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STAFF

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MISSOULIAN

A Poor Place to Die

By BILL CROWLEY

THE CORRIDOR was white and quiet, and the light was bright and hard and burned its way into the eyes. Occasionally a nurse hurried past, brisk, starched and efficient, and disappeared through the swinging doors at the end. Other than this, there was only silence. We sat on the benches, huddled and motionless, staring at the floor, almost fearfully avoiding conversation. Nothing had been said for almost an hour. The woman with the bandaged foot was crying, but the tears slid down her cheeks without a sound. The other woman brushed aimlessly at the dried mud on her skirt. Shan was beside her, staring fixedly at the floor. I pulled up my coat sleeve for probably the tenth time, forgetting that my wrist watch was smashed. There was no clock anywhere in the corridor. I got up and walked away as quietly as I could, down the hall and around the corner, past the closed doors of many rooms. Just beyond the head of the stairs was a tall, old-fashioned clock with a swinging pendulum, ticking noisily in the silence. The hands stood at three-fifteen. Almost two hours since they had wheeled Gino down the corridor through the swinging doors.

I started back and then, on an impulse, turned down the stairs. The sound of the clock followed me, tapping at the stillness, seeming not to diminish as I went away from it. A strange thing to find in a hospital, an old-fashioned grandfather's clock, but then, this was an old building and many things, the dark, aging wooden banisters, the paneling and the door frames, clashed strangely with the severe, antiseptic modern furnishings. Anyhow, the clock was there near the head of the stairs, with the long pendulum swinging, chopping Gino's life away with monotonous mechanical strokes. I turned at the bottom of the stairs and walked toward the front door, where the wind drummed on the glass panes. I leaned on a window-sill and looked out.

The rain was sweeping down steadily, filling the gutters and flooding over the sidewalks. The wind, pounding out of the mountains, tossed the lone swinging arc-light over the intersection into weird convulsions. The shadows of fire-plugs, telegraph poles, and iron railings leaped and contracted in live and mad calisthenics. The light of the swinging lamp climbed up the side of the dark brick building across the street and then fell again like the rise and fall of the surf. It made

queer momentary shapes of the barred windows of the county jail opposite. Except for the frantic playing of that light, there was nothing on the street, not a person nor a car, nothing. There wasn't even a light in the windows of that dark building over there from which the doctor had come splashing through the rain, to measure Gino, lying on the stretcher, with trained indifferent eyes.

It hadn't taken the doctor long. He looked, and he knew, and we knew it, too, then. He moved quickly enough, testing, watching, looking, but the motions were only those mechanical ones that must be made while life still flickers, but there is no hope. He worked with the quick irritation of a man asked to save something that is already past saving. His eyes swept over us once, half-accusing, half-wondering, unable to fathom the prodigality that had crushed this body and then brought it with child-like faith to him to be kept alive. Then he and the nurses went to do the things that they must, however hopeless, and left us to the hours and the silence and the white blinding light.

I wished I had never come back. I thought of all the turns, all the decisions, all the small coincidences that could have changed the stream of events and put me a thousand miles away. I had an old bitter feeling that a word, a move, a few days or hours ago would have changed everything, turned it another way. I shouldn't have come back. But fifteen years is a long time, and I couldn't have known it would have come to this. Gino had been glad to see me. He wasn't much good at writing letters, and neither was I, so we had let the years drift between and separate us. It was like meeting someone who had been lost. We talked of the days in the timber yard, when we were just kids, seventeen or so. We sat up half the night in his kitchen after his wife and the youngsters had gone to bed, and sipped his home-made wine. We even went out and got drunk together for old times' sake. So my few days in the old home town soon lengthened out into a week, and then I promised Gino I'd stay two more days for the firemen's dance. Those dances used to be big affairs back before the depression had settled down hard and sent half of our old gang out to the coast looking for work. Most of the fellows hadn't stayed as I had, and Gino insisted that I should come to the dance and see them all.

The dance was the same; they were always the same. Same old roadhouse, same old muddy country road, even the same rain that always came for the firemen's spree. And then, after we'd been there a while and everybody's hand was shaken and everybody's story told, it was the same old drunks and the same old fights, and the same feeling of relief when Gino's wife said she wanted to leave. After that it was goodbyes to the ones who were still sober, and a dash through the rain for Shan's car and the ride back to town.

It's a funny thing about accidents, you never know how they happen. Shan was driving fast and the rain was coming down hard. The car slipped and lurched in the muddy ruts and the headlights didn't penetrate very far. There was a little talk, mostly between Gino's wife and Shan's. When the other car came around the curve suddenly there wasn't much Shan could do. There was

the first heavy crash as the front wheels slammed into the ditch and then the smashing continuous thumps as the car turned over. I saw Gino hurled out of the door at the first impact, and heard his gurgling scream as the car rolled over him. Now, two hours later, I stood staring into the rain with the clock and the storm for company until the time that someone would come out of those swinging doors and tell me that I didn't have to wait any longer.

I didn't want to be up there when the nurses and the doctor came out. Maybe that was cowardly and left the worst part for Shan, but I didn't think I could stand it. It was bad enough down here with just my thoughts. They were running on as though Gino were dead already, picking up the past, throwing into my memory places and scenes that I had forgotten for years. There was only one clear remembrance of Gino; it kept coming back clear and sharp across the years. Maybe I remembered it because Shan was part of it, too. The image was bright in my mind as I listened to the rain and the wind and the ticking clock, like a heartbeat at the head of the stairs.

I was just a kid then, working at my first job in the Badger timber yard. Gino was my partner. Right from the start we were friends. We used to curse and scream "Dumb wop," and "Thick harp," the length of the yard and chase each other around the piles with timber picks, but there was no malice between us, ever. I never had a better friend than Gino. He and I ran around in a gang of about twenty or twenty-five. Like all the kids then, we had to play football, and we decided to put on a dance and a boxing card in the St. Joseph's school hall to raise money for equipment. I remember I was the one who had to ask Father McCormick for the use of the hall because I was the only one who went to church.

I can't recall now who boxed any of the other bouts, but Gino and Shan fought the last one. Gino was the only one of us who had any chance with Shan at all, and it didn't amount to much. Shan was a strange kid then, one who was with us but didn't seem to belong. He was a sure, shrewd, calculating kid, with his eye on what he wanted, a natural born fighter. The year before he had won the state featherweight championship, and had torn apart the Golden Gloves champ in Salt Lake in less than a round. In a small kind of way he was famous. We envied his familiarity with the bar-tenders, gamblers, and small-fry politicians who always congregated around the fighters. He was a complete failure, later, when he turned professional, but at the time we thought he was headed for the world's championship. He had the same ruthless, businesslike attitude inside the ring and out of it, and there wasn't anyone you could call his particular friend. Nobody wanted Gino's job that night.

I don't remember now what happened, but I was late and missed all the other bouts. There was something strange in the air that I felt the minute I entered the darkened hall. In the ring, up on the stage, Gino and Shan were circling carefully in the white glare of the ring-lights. There was hardly a sound in the hall, none of the usual yelling and noise. I dropped down on one knee in the dark aisle beside Emmett Sullivan's chair.

"First round," he said.

Up in the ring Gino was moving around carefully, flicking his left glove lightly into Shan's face, sliding swiftly away as Shan shuffled in, head lowered, hands busy, darting, probing for an opening. Shan shifted, hooked, hooked again, rushed—and met Gino's left jumping into his face. He backed, set himself, moved in again, weaving, punching, boring in behind those swift vicious hooks. Gino retreated, sliding away from the corners, stabbing that long left, catching Shan's punches on his gloves and forearms. It was so quiet you could hear the scuff of their feet on the canvas and the quick snorts of their breath as they punched. Shan crowded forward relentlessly, elbows tucked close to his body, hands whipping up in short vicious arcs. His back muscles were smooth and heavy and his skin pink under the lights. His crouch made him look short as he moved in to Gino. Gino's skin was tan and glistening with sweat. Beside Shan he seemed thin, almost spidery, moving away, flicking that left glove out into Shan's eyes. A little blood was trickling out of Shan's nose. He dabbed at it impatiently. The pursuit went on. Shan was waiting, pushing Gino always toward the corners, battering down his defenses, waiting for a chance to drive him into the ropes.

The crowd was waiting, too, down below in the darkness, waiting for Shan to find his opening, waiting for the sudden rush and the slashing punch that would knock Gino unconscious. Shan was like an executioner about his trade, or a butcher stalking a steer with an ax. Half in excitement, half in fear, they waited for Gino to make a mistake.

Up there in the ring, Gino's hands were busy. His left glove jumped, time after time, into Shan's slamming hooks, and he moved, tan and fast and gleaming under the glare of the lights, with an instinctive ease and grace. He frowned a little as he watched the tireless bobbing head of his opponent, always shaking off those lefts and coming forward.

The bell clanged. In a sudden rush the crowd noise leaped up, like the escape of pent-up breath. The fighters went back to their corners. The noise sank into a kind of excited murmur, mingled with the creaking of the folding chairs as people changed their strained positions. A steady, expectant hum settled down as the seconds doused the boxers with water, rubbed their legs, and fanned them with towels. It died almost to a whisper as the handlers crawled out of the ring and the bell rang again.

Shan moved fast, this time. His rush carried him into Gino's corner. His fists pumped up in the same vicious arcs, slamming Gino back into the ropes. The hum of the crowd burst into a scream. Gino fought back wildly. Shan shifted, hit, shifted, hit again. Then Gino's right cross buckled his knees, driving him out into the center of the ring and Gino followed, snapping his head back with lefts and crossing rights. Shan clinched and held and Jan had to pry them apart while the roar of the crowd beat down on them in waves. The tempo of the fight speeded up. Gino was still moving fast, circling and sharpshooting. Shan followed, solider, deadlier. His hands were twin hammers poised at hip level as he moved in steadily, shoulders rolling, a stung champion fighting

for his reputation. The noise was continuous, a broken staccato rhythm of excitement. Shan and Gino felt it, too. They fought harder, with less defense, punching their way into clinches and hammering their way out. Jan didn't interfere. They fought it their own way, a vicious, waterfront, back-alley brawl. Gino was still retreating, parrying the bull-rushes with stiff jolts, weaving quickly in and out of corners, refusing to be trapped. Shan was driving, charging, pounding those twin hammers to head and body, hitting constantly, never landing quite solidly enough. The bell that ended the round was a faint weak echo in the uproar. The next round was the last. The sound didn't die away between rounds, it didn't even diminish much. It flared up at the sound of the bell, dropped for a moment as Shan and Gino shook hands, and began to increase again as Shan took up the offensive, racing against the clock to cut his man down. Gino met him in mid-ring, rifling lefts to his head. That round was complete savagery. Shan landed his hooks again and again, pounding Gino into the ropes, and Gino fought back furiously, buckling Shan's knees with short ripping punches to the jaw. They were into the ropes and out again, hammering, clinching in the center of the ring, wrestling, stumbling, reeling back, smashing together again like animals, while the noise in the darkness rose into a scream, echoing like a sounding board every blow, every block, every miss. The bell clanged and clanged again and the fighters battled on, oblivious, slugging in the center of the ring. The noise was deafening. The referee pulled them apart, sent them to their corners, and then did the only thing he could do. He called both boys into the center of the ring and raised their gloves to signal a draw. I was so happy I couldn't move. Gino danced down the aisle, sweaty and grinning. The noise trailed after him like a ribbon, a stream of cheers that echoed and re-echoed. . . .

This is a poor place to die. The words formed themselves over and over in my mind as I stood and watched the rain. Here, to this wet and windy and miserable street corner, my friend had come to die. The wind whipped the arc-light, flashing the barred shadows of the jail windows into relief again. It seemed somehow appropriate that the jail and the hospital, the two resting-places of human misery, should stand together on this bleak street where the wind blew down out of the mountains, lonesome and bitter, driving the rain before it. A man in his most painful hours almost inevitably came to one or the other. On that other corner were the drunkards, the streetwalkers, the thieves, the knife-fighters, the wife-beaters, all the miserable unhappy sweepings of the streets who had life and didn't know what to do with it. Here, above and all around me, were those whose lives were not theirs to do anything with at all. In the glaring light of these antiseptic halls, where there was never either night or day but only those hot eternal lights, were the aged, the consumptive, the cancerous and the deformed, waiting for some magic of the same impossible sort that would heal the twisted and embittered souls of the others.

Gino deserved better than this. For him there should have been long life, and his wife and his chil-

dren and the easy sunlit years rolling away. Lacking this, he should have had at least a decent corner of the earth in which to die.

Across from the gray stone of the jail, the windows were all dark in the old brick apartment house. This was another building that belonged here; a dusty place of dark and tomb-like silence where women, faded and old, crept with their canaries and cats and threadbare shawls, to live out their last few years surrounded by all that was left of lifetimes of monotonous and lonely work as teachers or nurses or shop-clerks. I had a girl friend who lived there once, for a short time, but she had soon left, driven out by the eternal darkness and silence, by the faint muffled clatter of old teacups and old gossip, and by the odor of withered roses pressed in the pages of books.

That swinging light and the noisy pendulum were marking time for all of them, the aged and the imprisoned and the infirm, chopping away the minutes till each should find release. The clock was still tapping at the silence above, sending the sound sharp and clear down the stairs. There were footfalls, too, shuffling through the clock-beats, along the hall and down the stairs. I turned from the window and waited. They came slowly, walking as though already following the coffin. Gino's wife passed, her face buried in a handkerchief. Shan looked at me once, mute and agonized, then plunged blindly through the door into the darkness. Together the three of them passed through the arc-light's glare and out of my sight. I turned up my coat collar and followed, out into the night where the wind howled and the light tossed and the rain splashed down and down and down.

First Night

By NELSON WELCH

THE ADHESIVE tape came first. The actress held her left arm curved above the crown of her head with the long fingers tapering down against the right temple. With the fingers of her right hand she smoothed the skin of her forehead from above the nose towards the waiting left hand, which steadily upheld the tightened contour. Then she smoothed more gently away from the bridge of the nose under the eyes and up to the hand. Next from the center of the chin upward, the base of the jawbone upward. With the fingertips of both hands she firmly held the roll of tissue thus gathered to a spot above the temples, well in her hair. "I'm ready, Miles," The maid drew a strip of adhesive tape beneath the unwelcome tissue, pressed it firmly all along, and the actress's fingers slipped down to hold it in place. A minute later she dropped her hand and one side of her face was fifteen years younger than the other.

A similar process was applied to the other side. And the preliminary of Astrid Forres' preparation for her public was completed.

"What time is it, Miles?"

"Five after seven, madame. Plenty of time."

The actress relaxed in her chair, listening to the noises of first-night excitement that were constantly seeping through the door. "I've got a new man on the curtain, Jim. See he's there fifteen minutes before." "Where's Carl? There's a fuse in the floats!" A girl's affected giggle. "I didn't really want it so light, but—What do you think?" And a man's voice cutting clearly as he passed: "I feel depressed as hell!"

They were her company. All these people. She paid them. Paid them? Was that all? Of course not! But—when she had founded her own company she had visioned herself the beloved empress, overwhelmed with loyalty. Had it turned out like that? Of course it had, considering. Forget it! How long ago it seemed. Like another life. How long? Twenty —No, she really had forgotten. couldn't remember. The years were so imperceptible. Time was the length of a run. The number of plays done. "Such and such a year? That was when I had that awful flop. Don't speak of it!" 1933? Ah, that was "Claribel"! Two seasons run. And the notices: "Steps To The Head Of Her Profession!" Nothing could take that away. And yet—who remembered? The theatre was only a present. Past glory—nothing. Of course, a star could still earn money when

she was old. But not as an actress, as a freak. "I remember her— Never a great actress but marvellous personality. You can't imagine now—" Forget that! Such a time was not hers yet. Might never be! She was young still. No one could deny it!

She narrowed her eyes, focusing them on her face. Always she had the same sensation. This time she would look at herself and she would be young. Yes, young! Last time she seemed to have altered a little. But this time— She looked eagerly. There wasn't a line on that face. Not a line! Marks of character, yes. But even children had those. Lastly, reluctantly, her eyes came center and looked into their own reflection. Nonsense! That slight yellowness of the eyeballs, the tinge of red at the lids— That wasn't age! Just tiredness. No, not tiredness. Excitement! Just— excitement!

Her clenched fists sent a rattle into a glass powder-bowl. She came to herself. Dragging off a piece of silk that protected her head she shook her dark hair thickly about her ears. It covered the strips of plaster, obliterating them. Yes, the effect was marvellous! Marvellous!

She readjusted the silk. "Where's the '3'? Here—" She poured the faintly pink liquid into the cup of her left hand and with the right applied it smoothly and upward. Always upward. Tonight was going to be a success. A real hit. Must be! The last play had been indifferently received. "Miss Forres' usual accomplished performance." The one before that mildly. "Miss Forres' public had a good time last night." Three months only, eight weeks the last. Taking no salary herself after the first month, everyone on cuts. But that was nothing. It had happened before. Always she had fought back. Gritted her teeth and forced a success. When a success was imperative. For the sake of the company, as she always said. "Yes, I'm delighted with the success of 'Deep Waters'. For myself, no, but my company—" Well, it was true, wasn't it? She had kept absolute faith with them. And faith with the theatre, of course—

She paused, hand to cheek. Her face was now a flesh-colored mask, the dark eyes gazing strangely through their tightened slits. Where was the '9'?— She poured a little of the russet liquid into her left hand and smoothed it carefully over her entire cheek, from jawbone to temple on a level with her eyes.

Her eyes glazed again. The stage-hands adored her, certainly. She was a queen to them. Carl, the electrician, Tom, the head-carpenter, Gus, the property man, would have died for her, cheerfully. It was wonderful to know that. And the company? Of course! It was wonderful to meet them and see the ready smiles that sprang to their faces, always. And their longing to creep near her and tell her how marvellously she had played some scene— They fell in love with her too often, dear creatures, both the men and the women. But that was just their response to her glamor, her marvellous achievements. Why blame them? She had always been gracious, accepted their homage, and they were happy in it. Then there was Leonard. Always Leonard! Dear faithful Len! His whole life was dedicated to her, his one happiness to serve her. To have such a perfect devoted friendship was worth everything, something to hold onto. And some people had

dared to hint that he'd been just as devoted to Helen Brand, for whom he'd worked before coming to her. Jealousy! She had crushed them. It was true—she gave him a larger salary than he was strictly worth, and never had the heart to cut him as much as the others— But what of that? He hadn't asked for it. He was a darling!

Her face was more youthful than ever now. She applied a spot of Carmine No. 2 high on her cheekbone, smoothing it into a delicate flush above the backing of "9".

A tap on the door. "May I come in?" The voice of Harry Pearson, her stage-director.

"Come in, Harry."

"Anything you want me to do, Miss Forres?"

She considered. "No, Harry, I think not. Just see those children, the walk-ons, don't crowd the stage before my entrance. Get them back to their dressing-rooms."

"Right. Anything else?"

"No. Is everything all right?"

"Yes. Perfectly."

He smiled and went out.

A strange person. Wonderfully efficient. She trusted him more than anyone. He was the only person who knew all there was to know about her. But he was always respectful and businesslike. No warmth. Well, there never was perfection. Except Leonard, of course. Dear Len!

"It's nearly the half-hour, madame."

And Miles, what a good creature she was! Always ready with a smile, and how she worshipped her mistress! Thought there was no actress in the world— True, she was inclined to simper and use extravagant phrases— But what of it? Why analyze simple devotion?

From a tube she squeezed a spot of dark purple, smoothing the lightest of shadows under her eyes and a slightly heavier one over the lids. Now the beauty she was used to began to appear. But that odd look about the eyes— That weary— No, imagination! She looked at herself too much to be able to judge. In any case, from the front—

She swung round. "Miles, it seems to me there's a funny look about my eyes. Do you notice anything?"

"Why madame, your eyes are lovely! Just— Lovely! You're imagining it. And that's the truth!"

She had thought so. Of course. And yet— Miles hadn't been quite so comforting as usual. Why had she added: "And that's the truth?" It was one of those stupid catch-phrases she brought out at times. Still, if it was the truth, why shouldn't she say so? Was it the truth? *Was it?* Stop that! Forget it! But Miles hadn't even looked at her eyes. She had replied like a parrot. As she had done all these years— Stop! Stop now! What was the good? Life was what you made it! What you willed it! It must be so! But— if Miles had lied— But why should she have lied? She wouldn't have kept her all these years if she had been a liar. Unless— she herself had wanted her to lie, had encouraged her— No! Stop there!

But something gave in her mind, suddenly. Something that had been waiting a long and weary time to break through now took command. She was beaten— Well? Yes, Miles had lied. She had lied all these years. Why? Because her mistress had needed a drug to make her forget the doubts that were beginning to creep in— And the drug habit had grown. She had begun to seek it from others—

A tap on the door. The assistant stage-manager's voice: "Half-hour, Miss Forres."

Yes, she had begun to seek it from everyone— Well, what of it? Didn't everyone like to look on the bright side? What did it matter? Look at the success she'd had in the theatre. Her wonderful achievements. And she had never really faced the truth in anything— Oh, stop! Stop now!

But her concentration trailed weakly. Well, supposing it were true? It only applied to herself, gave her confidence, strength when she was tired. It didn't affect what she had done for other people. Her unselfishness. The love and loyalty she had inspired. But had she? Of course she had. Their affectionate smiles, their eagerness to praise her. Why should they give that if it were not genuine?— Because she demanded it and paid them. Stop! Stop there!—

But— the company was a hive of insincerity, yes. Had always been. Was there one who really loved her? Leonard, surely— No, Leonard was incapable of loving. He had the nature of a dog that fawns on the hand that feeds it. Incapable of judgment. And she had encouraged that quality in him. He was her most reliable drug. And the loyalty with which she had always defended him from criticism?— Was it loyalty to him or loyalty to herself? A defense of her own judgment? Loyalty— the word had been a fetish with her. Had she ever been loyal to anyone? Surely— No, unless it coincided with loyalty to herself. This she was only now discovering. She had honestly thought she was being loyal. Had been at a loss to understand why she didn't inspire loyalty. True, she had kept a number of people in the company for years—But that was mainly because the fewer people who knew her intimately the better, the fewer there were to go away and talk— God, how she had vaunted what she thought were her loyalties! To the press, the public, the company, to herself— How small! How shameful! People must have seen through it all the time. Must have laughed— God, how awful!

"It's nearly the quarter, madame."

She drew a thin black line on her eyelids where the lashes began. Then a faint one above her eyebrows, smoothing it down with a tiny brush.

A knock. "Fifteen minutes, Miss Forres."

There had been several real people in the company in her time. Excellent performers, too. But she had always got rid of them. They were tactless, she said. There was another word she bandied around. For anyone who said what he thought— Now the company was entirely composed of nonentities. And all of them less sincere, less simple than when they had come. God!— She had known all along, deep down, that they were a second-rate lot. Only now did she know that whatever they were she had made them. Yet she had often recognized in other instances that a community takes its tone from the head— The stagehands? They would smile and bob their heads to anyone who kept the theatre open. Harry Pearson? She didn't know. He was an enigma. But he, of them all, might have some sincere feeling for her.

"Why, you're in a regular dreamy mood tonight, madame!"

Miles was smiling with her head on one side. But in the round eyes

her mistress caught a flicker of anxiety. So— Something of what she was thinking showed in her face. And Miles. She had been a fresh willing countrywoman when she had come to her. Now look at her. Permanently writhing in a modest simper. Incapable of sincerity towards her mistress or anyone else. And making the woman call her "madame." There was something effete about it. People must have smiled at that—

She was applying mascara now. Having completed one eye she looked at the odd effect. It was the lengthening and darkening of the lashes that added the final expression. She started on her left eye; but her arm was tired, it ached. She let it sink down on the dressing-table.

"Beter get your dress on, madame."

"Why?"

"The five minutes will be called any time, madame."

"And I say, what of it?"

Miles suddenly became exceedingly bright.

"I'll just pop out, madame, and see if everything's all right. If the curtain's going to be punctual."

The actress sat there without moving.

In a few minutes Miles returned.

Why had she gone?—

A knock. "May I come in, Astrid?" It was Leonard's voice.

So that was it! Miles had thought she was "in a peculiar mood" and needed a shot of drug before going on. Leonard— He still said her name as if he couldn't quite get used to the honor. After all these years— But she remembered having snubbed others in the company for using it in a normal tone of equality.

"Come in, Leonard."

God, if he could only smile! That grin was carved on his face.

"How are you feeling?" he said, in his softest tone.

"How do I look?"

"Grand! Just— grand!"

But in his eyes she caught the same flicker of anxiety that she had detected in Miles! How quick they were to see she wasn't in her part. They were giving her the cues but she wasn't answering according to script.

"I mustn't disturb you," he went on. "I see you haven't quite finished your make-up. I know you were always ready at this time or I wouldn't have—"

She had been waiting for him to get that in. She crossed her hand over to work on the lashes of her left eye.

"I'm tired." She let her eyes close and her hand drop for a moment. When she opened her eyes she saw that the brush had rested against her cheek and left a solid black mark.

"Careless of me," she muttered, taking up a towel. With a weary movement she dragged the towel across the black mark. It smudged completely across her cheek. Vaguely, she dabbed at it again.

She turned haggardly to her two henchmen.

"Why, look what you've done! You've spoilt your make-up, madame!"

Leonard was gaping, speechless.

She dipped her hand into a jar of cold cream and slapped a large clot of it on her face. With two short movements she smeared it across and the face she had so meticulously built above her own was gone.

Miles took charge. She turned to Leonard. "Tell Mr. Pearson madame isn't ready. It's twenty after. Tell him to hold the curtain at least ten minutes."

"Is that time enough?"

"Yes. Madame often makes up in twenty minutes. Please tell him."

They were settling it all between themselves. This was a crisis.

"Why should I go on?" she said.

"Think of the company, madame!"

"You've always been so wonderful to us!"

"I don't see why I should go on if I don't want to," she said. "Why can't you be wonderful to me, for once?"

She was wiping the mess from her face. It was now quite clean, as when she had started. What to do? Oh, God, what to do? She had to go on, of course. For the company's sake. Really for their sake this time. All right, she would go on—

She turned to Leonard. "Tell Harry I'm ready. Tell him not to hold the curtain." She passed a comb through her hair. It stuck on the strips of plaster. "Give me a damp towel, Miles."

"Oh, no, madame, you're not—"

The actress got up, abruptly. She held a towel under a flow of hot water, squeezed it and applied it to her head.

"Madame! Madame!" Miles wrung terrified hands. "Whatever are you doing?"

"If they don't want me with my drooping face—" The strips of plaster came easily away. "They needn't have me at all. You'd better go, Leonard, before you get sick. Curtain punctually, remember."

His mouth opened but no sound came. He fumbled his way out.

"My dress, Miles. A little powder first, I think. I don't want to reflect the lights. That's it." She combed her hair quickly into place.

Miles started to weep as she smoothed down the dress.

"There, you see, Miles. I'm ready and in plenty of time."

The audience would be out there now. The critics— They had been, for the most part, kind. They had been taken in by her vaunted altruism, credited her with high ideals. And she had played every part she'd ever wanted to! Only John Hendricks of *The Dilettante* had never had a good word for her. A synthetic product, he had called her. A surge of laughter rose in her, suddenly. He couldn't say that of her tonight! Couldn't! Whatever else she was, she would be real!

"Madame, don't!"

She choked down the laughter. What would they think? Seeing her like this? Well, at least it would shock them. Give them something more to talk about than: "Astrid Forres again—"

"Beginners, please! Miss Forres, please!"

The assistant stage-manager, an insignificant youth with a mustache, appeared at the door. His eyes bulged as he saw her face.

"Yes, I'm ready," she said.

He turned his scared eyes to Miles.

"I said I'm ready!"

He backed out, precipitately.

How insane it all seemed now. Why had she fought on all these years? She had felt like giving in, at times. Why hadn't she? Was it because she couldn't? Because work was a weakness with her? She had always prided herself on having no vices. "I don't drink, I don't go social, I don't have affairs." Was it this?—

The openings notes of the orchestra came. She smoothed her hair, briefly, and turned away. She was passing through the door

when a sense of giddiness touched her. She staggered, grasping the door-jamb. It passed. Well, she must go on. She must keep the curtain up—

As she reached the side of the stage the faces of the gossiping groups turned instantly towards her. And as she looked at them a paroxysm of rage gripped her. They were not subdued, frightened, as she had anticipated. They looked more excited than shocked. God, some of them seemed to be enjoying themselves! What was a near-tragedy to her was to them merely a thrill of the unusual!

She was raging as she moved into the backing of the door through which she was to enter. The blood had flooded to her head so that she could scarcely see. God, the cheap, ignorant! Then she realized something. At least she was alive! She would put this vitality into her performance! She would show them!

Voices approached, passing close behind the flat against which she stood.

"Why on earth do you think she did it?"

"I guess she knew the show was a flop, anyway."

"I think it's drink. I saw her coming out of her dressing-room. She could hardly stand—"

That would be all over town tomorrow. She had been drunk and gone on for her opening without make-up. "I know it for a fact. One of the company—" God, what a profession!

She heard the orchestra finish, the rush of the curtain, the opening lines. Well, she was ready! Never had she felt so much drive in her. It flashed on her what she might give the performance of her career. She would show them!—

God, her cue! She leapt to the door and entered.

The actor who was speaking hesitated, anticipating a reception. But none came. He had begun the next line when a diffused flutter of handclaps came, dying out instantly with an oddly embarrassing effect.

She played the opening scene quietly, holding down the flood that was seething in her. She was waiting for the end of the act, for the scene that she loved, the big scene for her. This was the main reason why she had bought the play—

It was coming now. She was standing up-stage, gazing down from a window, while two of the men played a scene down-stage. She gathered her strength for the interrupting line: "I'll tell you what must be done!" Now!—

She turned and moved down-stage, taking a breath to deliver the line with all her force. She opened her lips to speak—

But nothing happened. She heard a clicking sound in her throat. One of the men turned.

She took a step forward, heard a rising gasp from the audience—Everything merged into a flash of white light and she pitched forward onto her face.

She came to herself and was conscious of a dim light. She was lying on the couch in her dressing-room. As her mind cleared she wondered if anything awful had happened. She moved slightly. No, she felt all right. She let her eyes flicker and saw Miles slumped in a chair near her and Harry Pearson smoking at the end of the room.

Then Miles was standing over her.

"The doctor's on his way, madame. Relax now."

"I'm all right. Harry?"

"Yes, Miss Forres."

"Don't look so solemn. It was

nothing. I just blacked out, that's all."

He looked down at her.

"We won't open tomorrow, will we?" she said. "Let's fix it for three days time. We can do with some extra rehearsal."

Something struck her, suddenly. God, the publicity this would get! It would hit every headline that she had collapsed at her opening! Fifty thousand dollars worth of publicity! Her brain began to work, excitedly.

"The doctor's here, madame." Miles was at the door.

"Wait!" She sat up, easing her feet onto the floor. "Wait! I don't want to see him now—"

"Madame!"

"I'll call him in the morning if I need him."

"Miss Forres—"

She turned on them. "Haven't I had enough to put up with? From all of you? Now do as I say!"

Miles whispered at the door.

Harry Pearson sat down, facing her.

"Miss Forres, there's something I have to tell you. There'll be no point in opening this play. It hasn't a chance. Everyone in the company's known that from the first week of rehearsal. I spoke to John Hendricks and Robert Gorer. They both said they'd write it off as a failure."

"Oh, John Hendricks!"

Leonard had crept into the room but she ignored him.

"What about the 'Rachel' play, then? "You know I've an option on it. It's a good play and a wonderful part. We could put it on in a month. Five weeks, anyway."

"I don't think it's as good as you think it is. Listen, Miss Forres. You've had great courage in the past. Wonderful courage. I've always admired it in you. But you're tired now, very tired. Why not take a rest? For a year or two? I've worked the whole thing out. You have twenty thousand odd in the bank. You have your diamond necklace and bracelets and the pearls. That's another thirty thousand, at least. You can invest fifty thousand, in annuities. At your—"

"Go on."

"At your age you'd get eight per cent. That would be four thousand a year. You could live on it, in the country. You'd have the ground under your feet."

She looked past him to Leonard and Miles. They looked steadily back at her.

"I see! A conspiracy!"

She stood up, swaying, steadying her self against the back of the couch. Then she drew herself up.

"You're fired! The lot of you! The god-damn lot of you! You, Harry, of course, you too, Leonard, and you, Miles. You can batten off somebody else for the rest of your lives. Harry, have the company paid off with the Equity bond. Now get out! *Get out!*"

She sank down in front of the mirror. She wasn't really ill. It wasn't as if she'd had a stroke—of course not! The worry of the past months, years, had got her down. That was all. All she needed was a success, a real hit. If the "Rachel" play got over it would give her health, strength, everything again.

She leaned forward. God, what a fool she'd been! To have gone on looking like this! What an utter idiot! To have thought she could give a performance, looking like this!

Crossing her arm over she carefully drew up the skin on the left side of her face. Yes, the effect was marvellous! *Marvellous!*

Grandfather's Visit

By LEROY ASERLIND

BOTH Sister and I were very excited when Mother received a letter from Grandmother telling her that Grandfather was coming to visit us. We had always heard Father talking about the "old geezer," so naturally we wondered what he looked like.

When Grandfather came, a day after the letter, Sister and I were quite disappointed because Grandfather looked almost like any other old man we had seen, except maybe he was a little taller, stood up straighter, and had a different look in his eyes. His face was the color of a sun-baked vacant lot, and his eyes looked like two new glassies in a bull-ring. Except I never saw any glassies that glittered like Grandfather's eyes when he looked at certain things.

Grandfather used to punch cattle in his younger days back in Wyoming and the Nebraska panhandle and he sounded like it whenever he talked. He even smelled a little like it.

"Howdy, datter," he said to Mother when we met him at the depot. "I'm jest fixing to set a spell with ya. I figger it high time I was taking more interest in my kids, and your mother thought so too. Sometimes I think she's jest tryin' to get rid of me for a spell." As it turned out, I think Grandmother was trying to do that.

As long as I could remember our household had been running along just the same as always, five or six years at least. Father got up and shaved, then mother got up and got his breakfast. Then father went off to work. After he went off to work, Mother waked us kids up and got us ready to go to school, and after we left she usually lay down on the couch for awhile, then got up and did her housework. On Sundays we always went to the Methodist Church together, then came home and ate our Sunday meal, then maybe went for a drive or to a movie. It had always been the same, but things started changing as soon as Grandfather showed up.

Grandfather went to bed early at night, but we could always see a sliver of light, where he hadn't quite pushed the rug up tight enough against the door. Then about midnight we could usually hear him stirring around downstairs. He always denied it when Mother asked him what he was doing in the middle of the night, but Mother always found a pile of dirty dishes in the sink every morning. Grandfather used to read in bed a lot, and one day I found one of his books he was

reading and hid it in my room. When Mother found it she had Father give me a licking, but the book wasn't very good anyway.

Grandfather would always make Mother get out of bed between five-thirty and six every morning. I'd hear him yelling at her, "Come on, datter, time to git up, the sun's halfway acrost the heavens an' I got a big hunger on." So she'd get up out of bed, trying not to wake Father, and fix Grandfather's breakfast of two eggs and four or five pancakes. He always told her that "the breakfast is the most important meal of the whole bloomin' day."

About the time Grandfather would be all through eating it would be about time to wake up Father and feed him. Then it was our turn. Every morning on our way out to school we would stop to say goodby to Grandfather but we never got the chance because he would be sound asleep on the couch, and I guess he stayed there till noon.

Grandfather was very definitely upsetting what Father called our "routine," and Father also said that the only way they could get Grandfather to leave was to upset his routine.

Sunday was the one day in the week Grandfather wouldn't get Mother out of bed early, on that day he stayed in bed until noon, when we came home from church. Then he usually came down to eat Sunday dinner with his nightshirt tucked into the top of his trousers—which Mother didn't like at all. So Father and Mother decided to kill two birds with one stone and make Grandfather go to church early Sunday mornings.

So when Grandfather came in one Saturday night—he said he'd been to a movie, but it smelled more like he'd been to the Post Office—Mother said to him as stern as she could, "Grandfather, I can't have you setting a Godless example for Brother and Sister to follow the rest of their lives, so tomorrow you will have to get up with the rest of us and go to church. I'm not telling you what church to attend, that wouldn't be Christian, but I'm going to send Brother along with you to make sure you go."

"Okay, datter," he answers, "but if'n I recollect, the Good Book says that Sunday is the day of rest. You rest in bed, so I figger I'm carryin' out the word of the Lord to the letter by stayin' in bed Sundays and not tempting sin by bein' up and around."

But this was one argument that Mother won.

Grandfather and I left the house a little after Father, Mother and Sister did. On our way to church we passed the Nazarene Church, and Grandfather stopped to look at the church billboard. At the bottom it said something about "Holy Communion Today."

"Brother," said Grandfather, "Isn't this Holy Communion where you have a little shot of wine?"

"Yes, Grandfather," I answered, "only over to our church we have grape-juice, which tastes better than wine."

"We'll go here, Brother," said Grandfather, dragging me up the stairs to the church.

We sat up in the front row. The preacher said because the altar was so small we would have to go up to communion by rows, starting with the front. Grandfather and I went up together. He drank my wine, what little there was of it, but the bread wasn't bad. Then, when we went

to sit down again, Grandfather led me to the second row back, then we went up with the second row, and he drank my wine again. By the time we reached the back row I was getting quite tired of eating bread, but Grandfather still seemed to be enjoying the wine.

The preacher started the sermon then. Everytime he would say a few words, somebody would join in and say "Amen." After awhile Grandfather would join in, and he finally got so he was saying "Amen" louder and more often than anyone else in the church. He seemed to enjoy doing it.

After the sermon Grandfather hung around the altar till everyone had shaken hands with the preacher and left. Then Grandfather went up and shook hands and started talking with the preacher. After awhile they sat down and started talking about Nebraska. That was Grandfather's home state and that was where the preacher had come from. Pretty soon the preacher offered Grandfather another communion, and Grandfather took it. Then the preacher took communion himself. The more they talked, the more they would take communion. Pretty soon they were calling each other "Pard" and slapping each other on the back. Then they started singing hymns and cowboy songs until the communion was all gone, and then Grandfather decided it was time to "pull leather."

On the way home Grandfather started singing all sorts of songs, and as loud as he could—gosh but Grandfather had a good voice. Everybody was eating their Sunday dinner when we came down our block, but they all came out to listen to Grandfather sing. People came out with food in their hands, napkins tucked under their chins, in shirt sleeves and everything else just to listen to him. A couple of old men even cheered him when we went by—gosh but I felt proud. Just before we reached our front walks Mother and Father came out and rushed Grandfather upstairs to his room. They wouldn't even let me go up and speak to him.

On Sundays after that Mother and Father told Grandfather to stay at home and look after the house while the family was away at church. I didn't see how Grandfather could look after it while he was in bed, cause I had a heck of a time waking him up when we'd get home.

Grandfather always smoked a great big, black smelly old pipe all the time. After awhile everything in the house got to smelling like it, and I even got to liking the smell of the pipe, but I don't think Mother or Father did.

I used to wonder if Grandmother didn't get lonely for Grandfather at times. One night I was working on a model boat and Mother and Father were sitting at the dining room table doing nothing except looking at each other. I asked Father, "Father, doesn't Grandmother ever miss Grandfather? I don't see how she can do all her work around there without him to help her."

Father looked at Mother, and Mother looked at Father, then Father looked at me. He put his arm around me and said, "My son."

Then Mother looked at me and said, "Our son."

Then they sent me to bed.

Next day at noon Father came home from work looking sad. I asked him what was wrong, but

he just looked sadder. He went over to Grandfather who was listening to "Mac and Emma—Home Folks" on the radio. Father started to talk but Grandfather just made him shut up.

After "Mac and Emma—Home Folks" was over, Grandfather started eating. He stopped when Father said, "Grandfather, I got a letter from Grandmother today." When he was sure that Grandfather was looking, he looked sad again. He pulled a letter out of the envelope—it looked just like our stationery—and started reading the letter out loud to Grandfather. In the letter Grandmother said how lonely she was getting, and how much she missed dear, sweet, Grandfather. She told how her back was ailing quite a bit of the time, and how the chores were getting harder and harder. It was a very sad letter, and I felt sorry for Grandmother without Grandfather to help her out. I could see Grandfather looking very sad when Father finished reading the letter. Then Father didn't say anything. He just went over to Grandfather and laid his hand on his shoulder, looked into his eyes, nodded, and went off to the office.

Grandfather went around the house all the rest of the day looking sad, and by that evening I knew he was fixing to go home. I figured he would probably leave the next day. I felt kind of sad too.

In the middle of the night I woke up and heard Grandfather going down stairs. He was down there quite a little while. Then he came up again and went to bed.

Next morning Father asked Grandfather if he was going home to Grandmother. Grandfather looked up at Father a minute. I could see his eyes shine like they did when he would tell me a story about himself, and then he said to Father, "Yistiddy I wuz aimin' to go home, even had my warsack half loaded. But then last night I went to bed, and durin' the course of the evenin' I had me a vision. This here vision was of Grammaw. She said she didn't want me litterin' up the place fer a spell yet, best I stay away fer awhile, and she also told me that her back was better now. In fact, she told me that it had never been better in her life. Now maybe you wouldn't believe in these visions of mine—but dammit, younker—I set a heap of store by em'." Then Grandfather went over to the couch, winked at me, and fell sound asleep.

"Cold-blooded old coot," said Father, as he left for work.

About a week later Father came home looking very sad again. He pulled out an envelope and showed it to Mother. Mother looked very sad too. She shook her head and put the envelope in the writing desk, and went back about her work.

When I looked in the envelope all I found was a telephone bill for $18.65 for a long-distance call to Merton, Nebraska. It was funny too, the bill was dated a week before.

I used to talk to Grandfather a lot. He used to tell me stories of fighting injuns and renegades. He told me how in one battle he killed fourteen injuns and scalped them all, every last one of them. He told me about hanging rustlers to the tree and watching them kick their last breath. When I'd tell these stories to Mother she wouldn't like to hear them. Sometimes when I would tell them in Grandfather's words she would

make me wash my mouth out with soap. One day I cut off a lot of Sister's hair pretending she was a Blackfoot squaw and I was scalping her. I really got old-billy-hell for that. But when Mother caught me with a noose around Sister's head and her standing on a chair she told me not to have Grandfather tell me any more stories or else I would get the worst licking I'd ever had. I guess women are all just naturally sissies.

One night I got up to go to the bathroom—Mother wouldn't let me keep a can under my bed like Grandfather did—and through a crack in the door I heard Mother and Father talking to each other in their bedroom.

"Mother," said Father, "I was going over the food bills today, and at present the total food bill is way out of proportion to what it was six weeks or two months ago. Aren't you budgeting yourself anymore?"

"It's Grandfather," answered Mother. "He eats more than any three people I've ever seen. I think that's half the reason he stays here so long. He's put on fourteen pounds since he came to live with us."

"Well, Mother, if I thought it was your good cooking to blame I would suggest we do something to lessen Grandfather's enjoyment. . ." and then Father started giggling so much I couldn't hear him say any more, so I went on to the bathroom.

The next day I was in the kitchen helping Mother set the table and she was fixing some salad for us. She put French Dressing on hers and Father's salad, mayonnaise on Sister's and mine, then on Grandfather's she put a new kind of salad dressing called Min'ral Oil. For the next few days almost everything she served Grandfather had his favorite salad dressing on it. She would even try to get a little Min'ral Oil in his spuds and mix a little of it in his coffee. He sure had a heap of the stuff for the next few days.

About the fourth day he comes in and puts his arms around Mother.

"Datter," he says, just like that, "Datter, I wisht your old Ma was half the cook you was. For the first time in nigh on to forty-fi' years I hain't been bounden up all the time."

Mother must not have liked him to say that, because she never did give him any more of his favorite dressing.

Things must have been changing around our house all the time but I never did notice it until Father started leaving just a few minutes before eight to get to work, and not eating any breakfast, and Mother would give Sister and me money to get our lunches with at school. She even made Sister get our breakfasts in the morning. Sometimes when we would get home at night the house looked like it hadn't been touched at all during the day. Grandfather would usually be bellowing around like a hungry bull, but everyone was used to him by then.

We even got so's we didn't go to church much on Sundays any more. The whole family would stay in bed until noon, and then get up with Grandfather. I even noticed sometimes Father would eat with his nightshirt tucked into his trousers.

Grandfather used to call everyone, from the King of England to the old man next door, an "old

bastard," but I'd never in my whole life heard Father swear. Then one day I overheard him telling Mother that he thought his boss down at the office was an "old bastard," and I was surprised.

Things kept going on and on though, until pretty soon the whole family seemed to be living like Grandfather, and I didn't mind it a bit. I didn't even have to bathe twice a week any more, only on Saturdays. No matter how much we tried to please him, Grandfather just grew crankier and crankier.

One day after school I went up to see Grandfather in his room and he was packing all his gear into his old warsack.

"What are you doing, Grandfather?" I asked him.

"I'm fixin' to make tracks, younker," he says.

"Why ya leaving, Grandfather?"

"Son," he answers, "I'm pushin' seventy winters pretty close now, and I'm aimin' to live out my days in comfort in a clean house and I can't find it here. I'm going back to your Grammaw."

That's how Grandfather happened to come and go. I liked Grandfather an awful lot. I used to think I'd miss him when he left, but now every time I want to be reminded of Grandfather all I have to do is look at Father.

Brilliant Through Winter

By MARY FRAN LAW

The willow-tips are red and yellow now,
And maple buds are bronze instead of gray;
The elms show chalk along their charcoal spray,
Cottonwood gum drips golden from the bough.
Only the pine-tree, brilliant through winter
In greenness to allay the cloying white,
Seems tarnished contrasted in spring sunlight
With the spoils of the returning voyager.
Why are we so content with what we hold
Until that forgotten is remembered
As new, superior to what we know?
Why must we then revile and scorn, high-souled
And unthinking, what has been disinterred
Before and now subsides in vertigo?

Ega

By JOE PAVELICH

THE THREAD of memory linking past with present is manifest in many forms but is spun richest of the stuff of sorrow, and the stuff of sorrow is the keen of a woman floating out over a valley in the stillness of a morning.

And the keen of a woman lingers persistently in the minds of men. It comes into rich sorrowful being on long lonely nights in alien lands, ladling out bits of remembrance that tug at a man's soul and mind and heart, and only death or return unravels its intangible thread.

Many keens have sprung from the village of Selo Drvar and many men have walked up the long trail from the village with the stuff of sorrow pounding at their steps and urging return. These men leaving the village have had that thread of memory follow them over half the face of the earth and into the strange graves far from Selo Drvar.

Many men have walked the trail from Selo Drvar to disappear over the crest of the hill into the anonymity of the world, but only one among them walked away alone followed by no sorrow. This man was Ega, and his farewell was a silent walk through a silent village followed by the hatred of his mother, who cursed his conception, his baptismal water, and his brutality and his strength. She watched as he walked up the trail and disappeared over its crest and as he disappeared she renounced his flesh by spitting toward him.

And so it was that Ega left his valley followed only by the curses of his mother, the hatred of the villagers, and above all their fear, a fear born of his cruel, strong arms, which could crush pride and courage from men with slow, brutal, pounding fists. Ega was strong, and the strength of his arms gave birth to contempt for all things he could not encompass and crush. His godlessness, his barren, eyes, genuflecting neither to man nor altar cloth, were all from the strength within him. Ega feared nothing and therefore was kin to no man.

1910 Sarajevo

In the low, long shed behind the barracks and the parade-ground, the recruits were lined naked and sweating to await the examination of the officer sitting on the platform in front of them. One by one they were singled out of the line and pushed before the collarless, sweating officer who probed at them with hard fingers to feel for defects and judge their worth to the military. The officer was irritated and the smell of the recruits standing naked in the

long shed pushed against him through the heat.

"Goatherds!" he swore, thinking of the cool cafana facing the shadowed square and the cool river under the bridge.

Ega was the fourteenth recruit singled out and he was pushed before the officer where he stood flatfooted and impassive even in his nakedness.

The captain mopped his hands and the back of his neck with a rag and looked up at Ega as he stood before him. The irritation of the morning grew in him as he looked at Ega.

"Your name, mulelover!" he snapped.

"Ega Uzelic, Gospodin Captain." The answer came out of Ega in slow, ponderous words, flat and passive.

"And your village?"

"Selo Drvar, Gospodin Captain."

The captain looked at Ega and his irritation increased. Something about the recruit angered him. The captain turned to the sergeant standing by him.

"And can you shake from this lout his plow walk?"

The sergeant answered, "Everything but his smell, Gospodin Captain."

Both the sergeant and the captain turned to look at Ega, and he answered them with eyes which held neither the fear nor the resentment they wanted to see. The captain jabbed his fingers into Ega's chest in a brutal search for nothing. For a minute he felt the flesh of Ega with his strong, clawing fingers and then he pushed him away from the platform toward the recruits waiting to receive their equipment and clothing.

Ega stepped down from the platform and walked flat footed and heavily toward the men waiting. The sergeant watched him walk and move among the recruits.

The sergeant, who had broken proud men with his fists and boots, loked at Ega and smiled to himself.

Sergeant Radusin was a hard man, a cruel soldier and courageous. He had to be cruel and hard and courageous to hammer discipline into the heavy-footed men from the mountains and to train them in tactics derived from the war college in Berlin. His boots and knotted rope moulded men to the uses of English weapons, German tactics and the proper subordination to Serbian officers in Russian uniforms.

Sergeant Radusin was doomed to one of the lower castes of the military hierachy and so, simply enough, he hammered the spirit from his men to gain his needed mastery. And as Sergeant Radusin beat his men into soldiers, he watched Ega constantly and followed him as he marched, and Ega answered Radusin with eyes that showed neither fear nor hatred.

Through the long hot days on the paradegrounds, Radusin found excuses to torture Ega. One day Ega had a dirty rifle and for this Radusin smashed Ega in the mouth hard, again and again. Ega answered as always with his passiveness, and swallowed the blood from his lips.

One day Radusin stopped Ega and made him stand at attention while he ground his hobnailed boots into Ega's insteps. Ega answered Sergeant Radusin as always. There was a faint flicker in one of his jaw muscles. Nothing else.

For five months Sergeant Radu-

sin tortured Ega. For five months Sergeant Radusin watched and waited, searching Ega's face for fear or defiance.

And then one night Sergeant Radusin disappeared. The officers questioned the men, and the men, thinking of Ega and his silence answered them with shrugs. In the end, an officer gathered up the records of Sergeant Radusin and in a bold hand wrote *deserted* across them, negating the years of service written into them, and the corporals pushed their men harder on the paradeground, thinking of the promotion to be filled.

And Ega marched and drilled and lived in the silence that Sergeant Radusin had failed to break.

1912 Kumanovo

Ega lay in the ditch, while above him, on the road, the artillery horses struggled and strained against their harness, trying to free themselves in maddening lunges from the shrapnel probing their flanks and stomachs.

Their screams, almost human in intensity, filled the cold Macedonian air to mingle with the flat, whipping sound of the shells bursting on the road.

One by one the shells fell among the horses and one by one they died, slipping in their own entrails and their own blood.

Ega watched a brown mare pushing and slipping while ten feet of her intestine dragged along in the road under her. Twice she fell and got up again, her haunches q u i v e r i n g in huge spasms of agony. Then she slipped by the side of the road, and remained down, while long, mad, whinnying sounds came from her. The shelling eased and Ega looked at the mare and detached the bayonet from his rifle. He crawled up the embankment toward the mare, pushing his rifle ahead of him. The mare quivered as Ega moved up close to her, and tried to rise. Ega moved around to her flank and brutally felt at her sides with his bayonet until he came to the underside of her hind leg. With a hard jab, he pushed the bayonet into the muscle and pulled the blade toward him. He jabbed into the mare's leg again and again and the huge jagged hunk of meat fell away under his bayonet. And as Ega crawled down the embankment with the hunk of meat rolled up and shoved in the pocket of his greatcoat, the mare screamed in agony while her steaming entrails pushed out of the torn sides of her belly.

Ega made his way through the brush in the ditch and crawled ahead. Ahead was Kumanovo and the Turkish artillery. Behind him, on the last surging of the charge that had brought him this far, were the bodies of the men of his company. Ega turned once and looked at the bodies relaxed in the awful finality of death. Far down the ditch, he saw Milutin, who came from the village close by his, struggling to rise against the pain of a shattered leg. Ega watched Milutin and then turned and crawled along towards the slopes before Kumanovo.

Ega stopped suddenly when he saw a Turkish infantryman walk from behind a stone wall to the side of the ditch. Ega dropped behind a bush, pushing his rifle out ahead of him. The Turk came walking down the ditch slowly and clumsily as he tried to keep the equipment at his side from clanking. He walked slowly, watching for bodies to loot.

As the Turk moved closer to Ega, Ega pushed himself up into a crouch, waiting with his rifle

pointed below the level of the Turk's stomach. Then Ega lunged from behind the bush and his bayonet came up in a short arc, catching an instant on the dun colored cloth before ripping into him. Ega shoved his bayonet hard and the blade of it ripped through the Turk, into his stomach. And as Ega felt the Turk's life pulse and wrench along the length of his rifle, he twisted and ground the blade further into him, and then pulled it out. The Turk fell to his knees, vomited, and lay back to die.

He watched Ega as Ega pushed aside his greatcoat and searched through his pockets, watched him with an idiotic wondering look on his face. When Ega rose from his search, the Turk was dead.

That night, Kumanovo behind them with its rifle pits filled with dead, staring men, the Serbs bivouacked in the orchards and on the hills, tired and victorious, and among them sat a man alone by a fire roasting a hunk of jagged meat, thinking not of the victory, not of the struggling horses on the road, not of the Turkish infantryman with the idiotic wondering look on his face, but only of the hunk of meat roasting over the fire.

1913 Bremen

Ega felt the blade of the pimp's knife slide through his coat in a sudden jabbing motion and he moved his hands out toward the dark and the hoarse breathing of the man holding the knife. The alley close to the docks was dark and the streets were silent. Ega moved slowly and the knife slipped past his outstretched hand again into his coat. The man in the dark felt cautiously for Ega and his hand went out methodically, feeling for Ega's stomach.

A few minutes before, Ega had stepped into the alley with the whore who had stopped him under the lamp near the alley. He had replied to her soliciting in silence and she had pulled him into the alley where her man waited for her. Ega heard the German as he walked into the dark alley and he stopped, listened, and then swung his fist hard into the whore's face. As she fell, Ega crouched and walked deeper into the dark alley to where the noise came from.

"Jesi? Jesi?" he whispered softly, dangerously in the dark.

The blade of the knife slipped by Ega again and as it did, Ega found the man's arm and pulled it towards him while with his other hand he felt for the pimp's face. The German pushed and strained against the power holding him and his breathing became more hoarse with pain and fear. Ega jabbed out into the darkness with his free hand for the German's face.

Ega growled softly and then pushed the pimp against the wall. With short, battering force, he pushed the head of the German against the stones, the force of his arms traveling up to his shoulders in short shudderings. Once, twice, three times Ega shoved out with the power in back and arm and the German shook each time. Ega brought his arm out again and then once more he shoved and the thick sickening sound thudded through the silence of the alley.

Ega dropped the pimp and turned to walk from the alley. As he turned, he stumbled over the whore. She was moaning through her smashed lips. Ega stopped and looked down into the darkness at the sound.

"Curva!" he growled, and kicked her.

Under the streetlight Ega

stopped and pulled out his leather purse. He lifted out the marks and counted them. His passage money was still with him. Ega walked away in the darkness toward the docks and the ship while in the alley a woman moaned softly, more in fear than in agony.

1927 Telluride

Ega opened his eyes to the darkness and listened to the sounds of the night. From the lights on the hill seen through the window came the sounds of the orecars rushing down into the mine shafts, rattling and shaking in their liberated lightness. From the darkness of his room came the sounds of creakings and groanings of the walls and floorboards protesting the chill of the night. And above all these sounds came the slow, dirge-like pounding of the stamping mills, heavy and inexorable and inescapable.

Then Ega heard another sound. It came suddenly, pulsing through the thin partition separating his room from that of Elia's. It was a long, tortured coughing that augured a lonely death for a lonely man.

And as Elia coughed wet, racking coughs to the loneliness of the night, other men in the boarding house opened their eyes and listened to the coughing sound through the thin walls. They opened their eyes and listened and tried not to think of the augury the coughing held for them all. Some of the men cursed silently the slow, lingering rot of Elia's lungs, others p u s h e d back thoughts of their own lungs and tried to sleep and others rose from their beds to reach for whiskey bottles on the chairs by them.

That night, as on other nights, death walked in its dark shroud, misty and dim and mocking and lonely, whispering its insinuating way over the men as they listened to Elia.

Ega listened to Elia coughing and then in his contempt for him and the weakness of his flesh, he filled his own chest with air, feeling his lungs expanding against their cage of ribs. Ega sucked in the foul, thick air of his room and then released it in a sudden gasp. His power surged back into him and he settled back in his bed, satisfied, untouched by the fingers of fear pushing at the other men. He rolled over on his side, hawked, spat on the floor and fell asleep.

1934 Hudson

High up above Hudson in the barren sandstone r o c k s were seams of coal close to the surface of the earth. In the beginning, the coal had been mined by men who were schooled in extracting it. These men knew their timbering, they knew the crazy faults of shafts tunneling down under the rock and they were experienced. But as the factories closed, the mines closed, and the men who knew the mines went away to fields more profitable and cheaper to mine. And with their going, some of the men of Hudson went up into the abandoned shafts, probed uncertainly at the rotting timbering and mined their own coal. These men, guided by desperation and haste, led a dangerous existence in the abandoned shafts and sometimes some of them died in the sudden fall of tons of rock and slate.

Ega was among those men who went up into the old mines, and, confident in his own strength, contemptous of others, he worked alone. And as he worked alone, digging deeper past the doubtful safety of the rotting timbers, tearing the face of weathered seams

away to bring out the rich blackness, the mine groaned with its hundred noises, voicing the danger of creaking rock and spongy coal.

Ega listened to the noises and spat out his contempt of those who dared not work as he did. And as Ega worked, the noises continued to grow in intensity, shivering out their warnings in sudden groans. But Ega pushed his bar deeper into the seams, prying against the coal with the great strength of his arms and back, prying in defiance against the noises.

And then, one day, the rock of the weakened roof answered the brutality and contempt of Ega's jarring bar with a cold powerful contempt of its own. That day Ega pushed his bar deep into the seam and the roof of the shaft groaned one deep warning that rang through the shaft. Ega stopped and then thrust his bar deep into the coal again, and the rock fell suddenly from the roof of the shaft in great scabby sections. Ega fell against the bar and the rock slid down over him, crushing his legs and his body against the seam of coal at which he had been prying. Ega turned as he fell, and the rock pushed up against his legs and body, pinioning him to the coal, twisting his body so that he faced the entrance of the shaft. And in that position Ega stayed until he died, with a view of the sky and hills beyond.

As the dust and rock settled over him, he opened his eyes and blinked them at the light coming from the entrance of the shaft. He lay there for a few minutes with his eyes closed and then he became himself again. He looked down at the rock on his legs and body and spat at it. With his arms braced against the wall behind him, he pushed hard against his imprisonment—and for the first time he felt the force of a power that negated his strength. Twice he pushed and twice the dust of the cave-in settled around him, mocking his helplessness.

For seven days Ega lay under the rock, his body and legs jellied into a tormenting constancy of pain. For seven days Ega's strength kept him alive, and for seven days his helplessness goaded and bit into his mind.

Ega fought the pain with his eyes passive and barren, and the nausea that welled up from the violence of his stomach was choked in his throat when he bit into his lower lip, biting through it in his defiance.

And on the morning of the seventh day, the pain from his legs and body and his disappointment in the failure of his flesh welled up within him, pushing away the film of sanity from his eyes.

On the morning the seventh day, Ega watched the slow breaking of the dawn, seen pink and new through the mouth of the shaft with eyes burning hot in his head. He stared at the breaking of the new day and he watched the sun as it climbed its way farther and farther into his vision. When the direct sunlight came down through the entrance of the shaft, it touched Ega's eyes, showing the deep, fathomless darkness of them. And in the depth of those eyes danced the little fires of madness.

As the sun burned its hot breath into the shaft, its warmth intensified the smell coming from under the rocks, a smell of violence and obscened flesh. The odor drifted up around Ega and he breathed deeply of his helplessness.

Suddenly Kumanovo burst into his mind, Kumanovo and the rotting horses and men in the rifle pits and behind the stone walls.

In that flashing instant of memory, so foreign to Ega, there came a realization of his strength and why it existed. Ega the strong man walked the earth forsaking all things kin to man, because he stood alone against the nipping, persistent pull of death. The flat whipping sounds of the Turkish artillery probing the flanks of the artillery horses, the thin flashing blade of the knife in Bremen and the coughing of Elia—all these sounds and substances defied his strength and his courage and now the rock holding him took on a new meaning for Ega. He, Ega, was a strong man standing against all things men feared.

And for the first time Ega laughed. He laughed at the rock and the earth and the sky and all things biting at his strength, trying to pull the mist and shroud of death over him and his strength. Ega laughed and raised his arms over his head, swinging them down into the sharp, cruel rock covering him. Again and again, Ega pounded at the rock holding him and his laughing was loud and wild and fearless.

Summoning the last of the power of his arms and back, Ega pushed the insides of his wrists down against the jutting slate. For a minute he held them there and then he pressed down hard and began to grind out of himself the life that the world had always wanted. With cruel, brutal, sawing motions, Ega rubbed his flesh away from the arteries and veins and then he raised his severed wrists in fists toward the sun and screamed out his last defiance. Ega the strong man had destroyed himself, cheating the death which wanted him.

And the scream of Ega went out of the shaft, out into the sky, and the madness and defiance in it stilled all living things around the shaft and beyond. The scream went out into the world, hurling against the hills, the sky and the earth. As the scream died a shuddering death among the hills, Ega died too, and the living things he had frozen with his defiance stirred themselves and moved about in their eternal search for food.

Slowly, inevitably, what had been Ega lost its identity with flesh and surrendered to the earth from which it came. The vitality that marshalled bone and flesh into positions of dignity and power, strength and posture, had vanished, and Ega's flesh fell away in dessicated strips. Soon there was nothing left of his chest but a grim, empty cage of ribs, arched remembrances of the power they once contained.

Slowly the body of Ega fell under the assault of time, and gradually tiny, insistent life of another kind stirred within the richness of neglected flesh.

And from the entrance of the shaft, furred animals and evil smelling birds slunk in to fulfill and justify their existence as scavengers. The magpies picked their way down into the shaft to what had been Ega and they fed on it.

Soon a magpie emerged out into the light and launched into flight, sated and drunk with the rich food. As it flew higher it gave its cry of life and a soft, gentle wind that sprang from out of the vastness of the sky picked it up. The wind drifted over the mouth of the shaft in a soft, gentle, mocking laugh, laughing at Ega, the strong man who had defied the universe.

The Largest Whale in the World

By REID COLLINS

THE SUN peeked over the little hills to the east of Salinas, California. The high fog turned and raced back to the sea from whence it came. Sticky grey slugs left their sticky grey paths on stones and sidewalks and crept back to the shelter of foliage. It was morning.

Portuguese stuck their heads out into the air, said nothing, and went about the business of getting ready to work the fields of lettuce that lay planted right up to the stucco houses on the edge of town.

Slowly the morning sun shifted the shadows along the freight houses by the railroad tracks, those vital rows of steel that took the lettuce away from the town and left money in its place. There Tom Neal wiped soapy water from his eyes and started to comb frizzly morning hair. "Jesus, not much of a place. Looks flatter'n hell, don't it?" He glanced along the tracks as if expecting something to rise from the ground and break the monotony of the plain that is the Salinas Valley.

"Nope, ain't much to see 'cept millions of little green heads of lettuce. Still, this has always been a good town for this show. All these foreigners is crazy about somethin' unusual." Mr. Gordon, Tom's boss, said this with confidence as he glanced at a railroad flat car covered with a tarpaulin. "May as well get to work an' undo the tarp. Sooner we let 'em know we're here, the sooner the word'll get around."

Tom nodded and starting unhitching the tarp. He folded it back over the upright supports, working his way around to the other side of the car and finally back to his starting point. As he worked, two huge signs on either side of the flat car were revealed to proclaim to the populace, "WHALE! LARGEST IN THE WORLD!" Down below this intriguing message other post scripts lured the curious by adding, "Also See the Shrunken Heads, Cannibal Weapons, and Other Denizens of the Deep!" It never occurred to Mr. Gordon that it might be best to shift the "Other Denizens of the Deep" up nearer the largest whale, and it never occurred to his patrons, either.

"Mr. Gordon, I've worked for you three months, now, and I still can't see why'n hell these people livin' right practic'ly in the ocean will pay money to see a whale. Christ knows that ocean must be full of the bastards!" He made a sweeping gesture west towards the place where the Pacific Ocean

should be and looked for an answer from his boss.

"Well, Tom, that's kinda hard to figure, ain't it? But then a lot o' these here Portuguese never even go to the ocean, though it's just a couple mile from here as the crow flies. Besides, whales ain't often floppin' right up on shore to where anybody can see 'em. They're denizens of the deep, yuh know." Mr. Gordon uttered this statement expansively and with not a little pride as he gazed fondly at the varnished top of the largest whale in captivity. Its back could be seen from outside the car, but painted side supports kept the rest from view.

"But you said yourself that night in Fresno you got it in. . ."

"I know, Tom. I know what I said, but that's a rare instance!" It always irked Mr. Gordon when Tom mentioned the source of the world's largest whale. He did not care to be reminded of the City of Los Angeles' generous offer when it found the hulking mammal lying on the beach, ready to rot at a moment's notice right in front of God and the citizens of Lost Angels. He regretted that night in Fresno when he confided to Tom, over the ninth glass of beer, that he had gotten the champion whale free for hauling it away. He was always glad, however, that the tenth round had never materialized, or he might have revealed his re-embursement of twenty-five taxpayers' dollars for the task of deportation!

Tom had been with the show for a short time. He had come from Oklahoma and bummed around California until he had delivered Mr. Gordon from a dispute over change for a five-dollar bill. He accepted Mr. Gordon's offer of employment gratefully, looking forward to the chance to travel with the owner of the largest whale.

And now he was looking across the lettuce kingdom and wondering who could eat all of it, calculating how many salads it would take to use up all the fields before him. They stretched for miles—clear out of sight to the west and east. The town of Salinas blocked the view to the southeast and the squat warehouses hid the northern plain from sight, but Tom felt certain of the existence of lettuce even beyond those barriers.

Suddenly a thin door slapped at the far end of the car and a short, chubby woman stepped out. "Mornin', honey. Mornin', Tom." All three exchanged greetings and Mr. Gordon inquired, "Have a good rest, Mae?"

His wife replied, "What do you think, with a bunch of pin-headed switchman pushin' this car all over California? I thought for a while they was never gonna settle us down." She cast her flinty eyes over the terrain. Squinting, she said, "God Almighty! Is there any money in a hole like this? All there is is lettuce an' a couple of mountains." She eyed the knolls which cupped the valley from the south and east.

"Sure there's money here," said Mr. Gordon. "Why, these Portuguese, they. . . Hey, look! Here comes a truck of lettuce. Headed for the warehouse, prob'ly."

The truck lurched along the warming pavement, tiny blotches of green rolling from the back of the load and bouncing down the pits by the roadside. The driver swung wide to the right and then, without warning, plunged left down the dusty embankment towards the warehouse and the nearby flat car. The vehicle

roared for the tracks and lurched to a stop beside the largest whale in captivity. Tom choked with the dust and glanced momentarily at the heads of lettuce rolling in the dirt. A pair of blue-clad legs thrust themselves forth from the open window of the truck and a coveralled man followed them, squirming adroitly through the aperture. He alighted before them, looked at the trio and then at the flat car. Evincing no disposition for speech, he merely stood there amid diminishing clouds of yellow dust.

Someone had to speak. "Don't your door handle work?" asked Mr. Gordon.

The sunburnt face above the overalls nodded towards the truck where no door handles were apparent. Having dismissed the question, the figure pointed at the flat car and asked, "What?"

Mr. Gordon allowed a moment to pass and then proclaimed, "Whale! Sea monster—biggest one there is!" Noting with disappointment no change in the demeanor of his guest, he continued, "Big fish—biggest damn fish you ever saw!" The last was fierce, more of a challenge than an explanation. "THIS FISH IS AS BIG AS YOUR TRUCK! BIGGER!" The last word echoed back from the warehouses.

At last the face changed. "How much?" it asked, guardedly.

Swallowing his surprize, Mr. Gordon answered, "Well, it's usually twenty-five cents." Seeing disinterest creeping into the man, he added hastily, "But since you're the first customer today, we'll make it ten cents." Mr. Gordon set his face. Even being the first customer of the day did not call for monetary favors beyond this.

The figure waited and then, seeing no further reductions in prospect, he produced exactly ten cents from a dusty pocket and offered it to Mr. Gordon, who accepted, turned, and beckoned the man to follow him up the wooden steps to see the largest whale in the world.

"Funny guy," said Tom. He looked at the lettuce in the dust. "Think you can use some o' them?"

"No, I don't think so. We can find better ones on the highway. Out there they don't get so filthy." Mae sat on edge of the stairway leading to the interior of the car. Inside, the droning voice of her spouse told in practical detail the various scraps of knowledge incidental to whales. "Largest in the world" repeatedly assaulted the heating air.

"He sure does know them words," commented Tom.

"Backwards and forwards," agreed Mae. "He's a good guy, the kind that knows how to provide for a wife—not like lots of 'em."

Tom was tempted to ask how she knew about lots of them, but asked instead, "We goin' to eat pretty soon? I don't like to hurry you, but I'm getting hungry as heck."

"Yeah, we'll eat pretty soon—just as soon as that damn dago gets out o' there. Them kind always want the most for their money. Always." She looked at the hazing hills and added, "Guess I'd better get inside and get somethin' ready." She disappeared behind the car, the door slapped, and Tom sat down on the steps she had left.

"Gonna be hot today," Tom mused. "Flies are out and the mountains are hazy already." He

wondered if he really liked this sort of thing, travelling all the time, taking care of the largest whale, and setting things up only to tear them down again. He wondered what was going on in Oklahoma—who was getting married in a hurry—who was lucky. He toyed with the possibility of finding the red light district in Salinas and then wondered if they had one. He decided that they must, and tried to recall his last time. He couldn't, so he concluded that he was "due" again.

"And that's it. What you've just seen cost thousands to collect in one spot. Tell your family and friends about it. Tell 'em you've just seen the biggest fish on earth." Mr. Gordon followed the figure from the flat car. They emerged into the sun and Tom could see the perspiration on his boss's face. "Come back again!" called Mr. Gordon to a pair of wriggling legs.

"Did he enjoy the show?" asked Tom. He guarded his eyes against the inevitable cloud of dust.

"Sure he did. Them foreigners is hard to figure, but I can tell when they enjoy somethin'." Mr. Gordon watched the truck wheel around and head for the highway, remember its original mission, and stear for the warehouse. "Gonna be a hot one. Even under the tarp it's getting hot, an' for this early in the day that's a bad sign."

"What time is it?" asked Tom.

"About seven-thirty. Yeah, exactly seven-thirty."

The door at the end of the car slapped. "Breakfast!" called Mae. "Breakfast's ready!"

They ate a simple meal and then returned to find workmen gathered about the car in an encouraging number. The morning passed and the sun moved the shadows of the warehouses along the beaten ground. Business mounted and Tom relieved Mae from the tiresome task of selling tickets.

The shadows caught up with the buildings and the silent laborers filed through the car in fewer numbers. Tom tried to keep within the protective shade of the canvas. He stood at the entrance of the show, selling tickets to the ascending patrons and taking them back as they went past. At first he wondered why they even bothered to sell tickets, but Mr. Gordon had said something about the law and added that it was more businesslike that way.

"Time to eat, Tom. Don't let no more in," called Mr. Gordon.

There were no more waiting, so Tom waited for his boss to go past and followed him out, slamming the little entrance gate behind.

"The sides are goin' to have to be painted, sometime," commented Mr. Gordon. He was running his hand along the roughly-painted partition which kept the non-paying customers from seeing anything but the gleaming back of the whale.

Tom said nothing. He was thinking about things entirely unrelated to business or whales. He remembered the dark Portuguese girls that had filed through the car in stoic silence; he remembered them and his thoughts disturbed him, for these strange people seemed apart from those he had known in Oklahoma. He recalled too well their sturdy forms filling faded men's jeans, the stimulus of revelation as they stuffed their shirt tails inside their belts. And he remembered the deep brown eyes that said nothing and said everything.

"How long do you figure on stayin' open tonight, Mr. Gordon?"

"Hard to say, Tom. That depends on the business. Speakin' of business, we'd better eat and get the place open again. Them kind o' people eat fast and work late. They may start comin' any minute." Mr. Gordon said something more as they entered the car, but Tom made no effort to answer. He gulped his supper quickly, hardly noticing or tasting it.

The shadows became long, creeping pools of black and the sun hung low across the endless fields of tiny nodules, a swimming ball gleaming dully through the returning fog. The air turned red. The dark people came back and in their midst were a few white ones who stood out like pale, waxen figurines, their pink-scrubbed faces shining under the white lights of the flat car.

Tom wriggled restlessly under the canvas, taking the tickets he had automatically sold, hoping for some catastrophe to force an early closing. Nothing happened. The generator at the end of the car droned loyally and the people kept coming to see the largest whale and the shrunken heads. Mr. Gordon's husky voice grew shrill, but he recited the usual prattle with unfailing dexterity, seldom hesitating at the end before launching into the opening lines.

Suddenly, the car began to empty. As if at a given signal the waiting line dispersed and those within the car pushed each other to get out. "What the hell!" exploded Mr. Gordon. "What in the name of God got into 'em?"

Tom watched in wonder as the trucks and ancient cars began to throw their uncertain beams at the clouds of dust. He stood by his boss as the vehicle pitched up onto the highway and began racing towards town. "I don't see why they're goin'. You'd think we was on fire or somethin'," exclaimed Tom. "Seems as though the whale ain't got much attraction for 'em all of a sudden."

From the darkness below him a voice asked simply, "Don't you know?"

Tom peered over the side of the car in amazement at the owner of the voice. "Know . what?" he asked, and stared at the barely discernable figure of a girl in a white flowered dress.

"The carnival. It happens every year," she continued. "You never heard of the rodeo—the barbecue —the parade?"

Mr. Gordon was standing by Tom, now, and he demanded, "What kind of a carnival?"

"Our carnival—the Portuguese celebration. Everybody goes. Aren't you coming?"

Tom's eyes were becoming adjusted to the darkness and he was seized with the urge to leap down beside the girl and get a closer look. "Hell, I didn't even know there was one. Seein' as though there ain't much business, though. . ." He caught himself and looked cautiously at his boss. "We'll have to close, won't we?"

Mr. Gordon hesitated. He was angry at the disappearance of the customers. "Yeah," he admitted finally. "I guess we may as well. Now, Tom, if you're planning on goin' to town, you make sure you close her up drum-tight before you leave."

"Would it be all right if I just lock up now and sweep in the mornin'? There ain't much mess to clean up anyway. I'd sure like

to go and maybe I could catch a ride now." As he mentioned the idea of a ride, he glanced again at the girl and knew she had smiled at him.

"I guess so, but be sure you close up first," replied his boss. "I'd hate like hell to lose any of this stuff." He brushed past Tom, stomped down the steps and, without looking at the girl, stalked up to his compartment.

Tom leaped down the stairs and stood looking at the figure in white. The dark of her skin contrasted excitingly with the whiteness of her dress and he remembered swiftly how long it had been since he had been near a woman, how long it had been since he had known the softness of one against him. "You think I could get a ride?" he asked and waited for her to smile.

"You can come with us, if you hurry," she replied. "Our truck is over there."

Tom was already whipping the strings that brought the canvas sliding down. He worked furiously, padlocking the chains that held the covering to the railing. In a few moments the job was done.

They walked quickly through the dust to a groaning truck. The girl's father took little notice of Tom after the introduction and they crawled up onto the highway. During the short trip to town the girl told Tom that her name was Maria, that she had been born in Salinas and that her parents had come from Portugal. She explained the celebration in enthusiastic language while Tom sat looking at her almost shyly and yet with an earnestness that he felt must appear bold.

They drove through the streets of Salinas in silence for a moment, looking at the gathering crowds. "We'll have to walk from here," said Maria. "The traffic is too thick farther on." They parked the truck in a driveway and got out.

"Jeez, listen to the noise!" exclaimed Tom. "It sounds like a million people all shoutin' at once!"

They said no more, but left the girl's father by the truck and hurried down the street towards the lights and din as if drawn by some irresistable force to join in revelry and become lost in the swirling splashes of humanity.

It broke upon them, a flood of sound and color, a tidal wave of insane, hypnotic splendor. It bore them up with it. They blended with the surging mass of faces, floats, and incandescent life. They whirled with the crowd, he holding her hand fiercely and leading in the fling, she smiling and following, both of them screaming with the rest and not knowing it. They metamorphosed from two simple people into unreal figures of fantasy, losing all identity in becoming parts of the entity which was the celebration.

Tom felt an elusive sense of being creep into him, a delirium that slowly lifted him from the enigma of his ordinary life and placed him above the plains of human incarceration. Never before had he experienced the feeling of being swept up by an inexorable force that gave him the power to be whom he pleased, that gave him the right to delusions of grandeur. He was free, and he wanted the strange, laughing girl at his side—wanted her not merely as a man wants a woman, but as a man desires consummation and fulfilment of existance.

They ran on, crossing and re-

crossing the street, stumbling on the curbs that appeared suddenly in front of them. The lighted floats rolled slowly through the thronging humanity, casting wierd hues upon the upturned faces of the crowd. The girls on the floats smiled fixedly and their skins were a deep rose from the glaring red lights. The mass moved on, a huge, Martian insect appearing still for a moment and then subtly moving again. In the heart of the din and motion Tom Neal was living in an exalting race.

Suddenly, swiftly, the mass accelerated, mashing its own members, wrenching with a peremptory spasm. Tom was vaguely aware of Maria's voice calling something to him as their hands parted. "Maria!" he screamed. "Wait! . . . don't. . . ." But she was gone, carried off in the wave of faces. He pushed vainly against immovable forms. He tried vainly to circle the nucleus and get ahead of it, but the swarm had left him behind and it was futile to give chase. He followed distractedly among the other stragglers who laughed at his inadequate shouts. His vocal efforts were little more than hoarse whispers and the other sounds swallowed them disdainfully.

Finally he became aware of his weariness and he sat down heavily upon a curb. "She's gone," he mused. "Gone, and I would've given my right arm to have. . . . Maybe. ." He glanced up, saw the futility of chase, and held his tired head in his sweaty hands. Slowly and sickeningly the drug of hysteria wore off and he fell back into his former world, dejected and frustrated.

He wandered through the desolate streets, unconscious of anything except a mounting wave of confusion and irritation within him. Small and lonely thoughts pervaded in jagged sequence his field of consciousness. "Maria was all . . . all in the world. I'll find her . . . can't live without havin' her—now, tonight." He repeated his thoughts to the cool air as he wandered westward. He walked on, unaware of a destination. The curtain of frustrated desire descended before him, confronting him with its impenetrable folds.

He walked westward and the terrain became corrugated. He was walking on through the darkness—on into the fields of knotted, squatting lettuce. The last street light gleamed uncertainly behind him, akin to his own dim light of hope and confidence.

At last he was vaguely aware of his whereabouts. Without bothering to look into the night, he thought, "Whale's off there to the right. What in hell is the damn thing to me? Mr. Gordon'll be mad, but what the hell!" And he knew he couldn't go back to the world's largest whale. He saw the futility of even thinking of return to the flat car.

The night grew old and still the lost figure shuffled through the fields of crisp, hard bumps. He uprooted them unknowingly, falling sometimes, but gathering himself up automatically and continuing. Salinas was gone. The world was gone and all he knew was that he could not think, and even this knowledge hurt him. The confusion and frustration coalesced into a hard, tense ball, and lay heavily upon his brain. The fog closed around him. He felt its wet fingers against his face. "Fog—all around. Can't see it!" he marvelled.

But the night was dying swiftly.

The ground under Tom's feet shifted slightly and began sucking on his soles. Sand. In the predawn darkness he was walking through sand. Laved by the thick fog, he came against huge clumps of unyielding blades. Grass. He was struggling with bunches of grass. His lagging feet climbed for a short time and then leveled off again. A quick, cold whisper of wind assaulted his fog-damp clothing. He heard a dull, menacing roar that approached and magnified with each step. The sea! Here was the sea, walking towards him in the night—a deep, endless mystery striding at him through the darkness.

The sound and chill penetrated his numb senses. "Why's it so cold?" he pondered, abjectly. "The end of the earth," he thought. "I've come to the end of the earth." He pitched forward on the crusted sand and tried to think of nothing at all, but his thoughts seemed to appear from the darkness and to lie down beside him on the earth—almost as if they had been following him at a distance and were glad to rejoin him on the sand. "Maria . . . God damn her . . . the whale . . . to hell with the whale. ." He felt that the loss of the dark-skinned girl had taken his life—or the one thing that could give him life. He remembered the clear, joyous thrill when he raced with her through the streets—the promise in her eyes. That was gone now. Irretrievable.

Tom noticed only vaguely the appearance of day. The sun rose over the high hills and the fog broke and ran before it. The whiteness faded and ran to the sea where it rallied briefly and then gave way completely in a helpless rout across the water.

The sun's warmth revived him. It stimulated a detached interest in the world. He rose to one elbow and watched the defeated fog sift down the slope before him and then—there it was—the sea! For the first time in his life he saw the ocean, and his consciousness began to focus. He saw the sun's rays assault the high ramparts of white and watched with admiration as the fog retreated and revealed more and more of the bigness of the sea. His mind centered on the endless expanse of blue. "My God, it's big!" he thought. "Jesus, how many whales could it hold? How far does it go?" He glanced down the beach and far out to sea and the expanse of land and water seemed to draw forth the tension from within him and to absorb it generously.

"What the hell was Maria?" he thought, surprised. "Just another—like all rest. Good for one thing an' that's all." He warmed in the sun and sat up. He knew, as he had known in the night, that he would not go back to the largest whale. "What will I do?" he mused. A new thought germinated and began to grow. Maria was not important because of herself. It was something different that he had glimpsed and met in the streets—something ephemeral, and perhaps gone forever. "But the world's a big place," he pondered. "Maybe, somewhere. . ."

The California sun climbed higher over the Salinas Valley and warmed Tom Neal's back as he sat on the sand, wondering at the vastness of the sea.

Shoulder to the Wheel

By AGNES REGAN

HAROLD Eaton followed his brother Gregor through the hall toward the steps to the rathskeller where the luncheon meetings were held.

"Well, well, Danny, how are we today?" Gregor said heartily, waving his hand cheerfully toward the elevator boy, a broad smile lighting his face. "Warm enough for you?"

The boy yawned. "Sure, Mr. Eaton," he said. "Great."

Gregor's laugh boomed out after them as he started nimbly down the stairs two at a time, with the careful agility of approaching middle age. Harold followed him, inwardly cringing at the sound of the laugh.

You don't need to start the service-club snow on the kid, he said to himself. He doesn't wear the little blue badge. He doesn't slap you on the back and call you good old Greg.

Gregor paused at the turn in the steps and pulled his watch from his pocket. "Seven after," he explained to Harold. "I don't like to get here too early. Just so it's before everyone's seated." He smiled knowingly, tipped his hat at an angle and with studied casualness sauntered down the last few steps. A group of men were gathered in the hall below.

"Hello, there, Greg," one of them called. "How was the district meeting?"

Gregor took off his hat with a sweeping gesture to all of them. "A fine meeting," he said. "A very fine meeting. A lot of good work accomplished."

One of them leaned confidentially toward him. "I say, Greg, how was the ah, entertainment?"

Gregor looked around him puckishly. "As I was saying," he winked, " a very fine meeting."

They all guffawed and one of them slapped Gregor on the back. "Good old Greg," he said.

Gregor let his laughter die with theirs, then turned to include Harold in the group. "I'd like you fellows to know my brother Hal. Coming in today, you know," he said. "Park Lessing, Charles Reiner—Chuck's our gold star collector. Hasn't missed a meeting in ten years, eh, Chuck?"

"Only nine," Chuck said modestly.

"A star for every year," Gregor explained. "Soon have to make a new badge for you, old man. And Wilber Burgess—we call him Snuffy—" He continued on around the circle.

Harold let them pump his hand and felt a silly smile spreading across his face. Ipana grin, he thought. Slip 'em the grip, boy, and stick on the Monday noon

grimace for the service club brethern. Smile for good old Snuffy. Brother Greg is for it. Brother Greg is a diplomat, a businessman.

"I'm glad you're coming in today," Snuffy Burgess was saying to him. "There's nothing quite like it—fellowship, service. I never had a more satisfying affiliation."

"Do hope you'll get on my committee," one of the men said to him. "Convention entertainment—going to be a big thing. We've got to get some new angle this year. Something to bowl 'em over."

"I think you'd do better to join my committee," Snuffy Burgess said seriously. "To get into the real feel of the organization a fellow should serve on Civic Welfare. There's something, well, satisfying about Civic Welfare."

Harold caught Gregor's warning glance and turned a look of serious interest on the men. "I'll remember what you say," he answered carefully. Good old brother Gregor, he thought, watching his brother's partially concealed relief. Still worried about what I might say at the wrong point. Worried that I'll commit myself and mess up the works. Worried that the kid brother will use the wrong fork or swear in front of the minister.

"Well, it looks like things are about to start," Gregor said cheerfully, herding the group into the dining room. He included them all in a confidential whisper, "I hear we have apple pie for dessert." He maneuvered Harold down the table toward an older man who was standing behind his chair. "Winchester," he murmured at Harold's shoulder. "He's the one to work on—Winchester Block and chain stores. Remember, a little deaf."

Harold nodded as the older ma turned and pumped Gregor's out stretched hand. "How are you Greg, old boy?" he said loudly.

Gregor flashed his smile an jerked his head at Harold. " want to introduce my brothe Hal," he shouted. "He's comin in today."

"What's that?" Wincheste said, holding out his hand. "Go ing to be one of us, you say?"

"That's right," Gregor said "Had to join right up, Win."

Harold shook hands. "How d you do, Mr. Winchester," he said

"No, no, just Win," Winchester bellowed. "No formality here Win to all the fellows."

Gregor slung his arm around Harold's shoulder and laughed loudly. "Hey, Jonesy," he called to one of the men across the table. "Almost got you a fine here. Calling old Win by his business-office name."

"None of that here, Hal," Jonesy called. "Only first names or you forfeit a dime. Tax collector takes his toll."

"Yes, yes, just Win, please," Winchester said.

Harold felt his mechanical grin spreading again. "Sure thing, Win," he said.

"Say, excuse me just a minute," Gregor said. "Forgot my badge."

Winchester leaned toward Harold and pointed to a large pin on his lapel. "A fine if you don't remember it," he explained in his stage-confidential tone. "Everybody wears a badge."

Harold studied the large blue disk with two gold stars and the printed name "Win" across it. He tried to think of an appropriate comment. "Good idea," he said. Damn good idea, he thought.

The only way to remember brother Snuffy's name when he's only a Monday-noon brother. Only Greg can be a week-round buddy. Smarter to label brothers Snuffy and Win.

Gregor hurried back across the room, shaking hands and waving at friends along the way. "Nearly forgot it," he boomed to Winchester. "Good thing I remembered before grace."

The group of men standing at the head of the table broke up and the president tapped an inscribed gold cup with his mallet. All the men turned toward a flag at the back of the room and stood with their hands on their hearts. At the piano someone played a bar and then struck a chord. "Speed our republic," they sang. "Oh, Father on high—"

Harold joined in the song, letting his lips form the words automatically. Funny to remember them, he thought. Haven't heard it since Hawthorne school. Not since I was in about third grade and Greg was leading the assembly singing. Greg, always the big wheel, even in grade school.

The members turned back to the table and bowed their heads. A red-haired man with his collar turned backward stepped to the head of the table. "Oh-Lord-bless-this-assemblage—," he intoned in a high nasal, "and-this-sustenance-of-which-we-are-about-to - partake-by-thy-gracious-generosity—" he gasped for breath and finished, "and-keep-us-brethern-under-Thy-protection-amen."

The chairs scraped back and Gregor gave Harold a gentle push toward Winchester's right, taking the chair on the older man's left for himself.

"We always start with a few songs," he told Harold. "Nothing like a few rousing songs to get in the spirit of things."

"What's that?" Winchester said.

"I say, I always enjoy a few songs," Gregor shouted.

"Oh, yes, always a few songs," Winchester said. "We have some fine songs. Always start with some songs—shhh!" He held up his hand and cocked his head to listen to the piano starting again. "Here's another one," he whispered hoarsely to Harold. He waited a few bars to hear what the others were singing and then joined in the refrain, "For fellowship and ser—ervice, we will build, build, build."

Harold's glance wandered down the framed charters and lists of names on the wall across from him. He picked out the gold-framed list headed "Our Boys in the Service," of the club, hanging between similar lists of Rotary and Kiwanis clubs. They all meet here, he thought. How damn sick the waitresses must get of this. Every noon potato salad and apple pie. Every noon brotherhood and a few rousing songs.

As the music died out the waitresses filed down the tables, slipping a bowl of soup on each plate. The men started to eat rapidly, hurrying to get to the plate of cold meat and potato salad which the watching waitresses exchanged for the soup bowl as they finished.

"You just back from Over There?" Winchester asked Harold between bites.

"Yes," he said. "The Philippines." He moved his plate back and a waitress slipped a plate of apple pie in its place.

"Hal was in the landings over there," Gregor put in. "Some fine tales to tell, eh, Hal?"

Harold moved his lips into a smile and dug his fork into the pie.

The man across the table looked up from his pie. "Greg here says you're going into business with him," he said.

"That's right," Greg said. "S t i c k together, that's us Eatons."

"What's that?" Winchester asked.

"Hal's coming into the office with me," Gregor repeated for him.

"Oh , fine idea," Winchester said. "Brothers together."

"It's a good thing, insurance," the man across the table said. "You meet a lot of people."

"Yes," Hal said. You catch on quick, he thought. Quicker than Winchester, I hope. Meet a lot of people, make a lot of contacts—Greg has it all doped out for the kid brother. Join the club, latch onto Winchester, polish things up a bit, and everything will be settled for a nice job in Winchester enterprises if you pull the strings. Greg could do it, and he'll teach the younger brother. Greg always has managed—it's all in the method and the contacts. Just watch brother Greg.

"You have a family?" Winchester asked.

"Yes," Hal said. "One child."

Greg leaned confidentially toward them. "Perfect love of a little girl," he told Winchester. "Beginning to know her Uncle Greg, too, isn't she, Hal?"

The men began to push aside their plates and lean back in their chairs, talking together and now and then bursting into hoarse guffaws. The president tapped his bell again and the noise subsided w i t h a chorus of hushing "Shhhh's" and chair scrapings.

"Before we have our regular reports today I believe Greg has a new member to introduce to us. I want to say he is most welcome coming in today and I know he'll get right in here with us and push. How about it, Greg?"

Greg motioned Harold to rise with him and laid his hand on his shoulder. "Hal," he said in his resonant voice, "it gives me more than pleasure to welcome you here today. It gives me deep satisfaction, not because you're my brother, but because you now become a brother in an organization devoted to fine work."

Harold stood awkwardly in the eyes of the group and listened to the voice going on. Greg developed that tone in high school, he thought. For the Legion oratorical contest. Practiced in the back yard and won. Funny how Greg always won, always seemed to be elected—

"And now," Greg was saying, "in token of our welcome to you today and our faith in you," his eyes swept the group and came back to rest earnestly on Harold's, "I present you with this badge, printed with your name, signifying the spirit of our organization." He pinned the button on Harold's lapel and pressed his hand. "I know," he concluded impressively, "that you'll get right in there with us and push."

Harold sat down amid the applause and shook Winchester's extended hand. "Congratulations," Winchester said to him. "Welcome into the club, Hal."

"Thank you," Harold said. "Thank you, ah, Win."

"Nice little ceremony, isn't it?" Winchester said. "Impressive."

"Yes," Harold said.

"Congratulations, Hal," the man across the table said, stretch-

ing out his hand. "Glad you're one of us."

"Thank you," Harold said. He strained to see the name on the lapel badge. "Thanks, Clem."

Winchester leaned toward him. "Now I want to be the first to enlist you onto my committee," he said. "Membership committee, that's mine."

Here we go, Harold said to himself. Here goes number one step to a sale. A sale of Hal Eaton, brother of good old Greg, to the Winchester enterprises. Polish up the old apple and step in there like Greg. For God's sake, you got a wife and kid. You can be better than Greg, because he half believes his own line. And you won't be fooling yourself. Just keep your tongue in your cheek and watch good old Greg—

"Going to have a drive in September," Winchester was saying. "A mighty important committee. We'll have to organize soon and really put this drive over. You'll be one of us, eh, Hal?"

Harold caught Gregor's eye over Winchester's head. Don't worry, Greg, he thought. In high school I might have been honest with him. In college I might have laughed in his face. But candour dies when the bills roll in. Don't worry, Greg, old boy, the kid brother's growing up.

"What's that?" Winchester said.

Harold took a deep breath. "I'd be honored, Win," he shouted. "Count me in." He repressed a smile that twitched at the corner of his lips. "I'm with you," he said. "We'll all get behind this thing and push."

Boston, Early March

By WALTER KING

The gulls, escaped from frozen light
and Basin come from off the bay
wandered web-footedly along
the Charles's ice-edged way.

"Release, release," they seemed to squall.
"Renew, renew," I longed to sing.
For they were joyous, as was I,
anticipating spring.

Relinquishment

By MARJORIE BOESEN

RALPH THOUGHT of all the thousands of people who must have traveled on this same train, sat in this same seat, and known equally tormenting battles within their minds and hearts. Then he looked up at the bright little college stickers on his luggage overhead, and the brief objectivity passed. The others would plead with him, and it would be hard to withstand the onslaught of their emotions. But his father was getting old. Each vacation had brought a more shocking realization of this fact, each year Ralph felt less adequate to retain his grasp upon the vigorous comradeship of their lives together. The train was rushing on with the inevitability of doom, and he was coming home from college for the last time. With startling swiftness, he recognized streets, buried as they were in snow, and saw mocking holiday decorations poised in the brittle air. They were all waiting on the platform, and he edged down the aisle, steeling himself to exert a gaiety he believed he could never really feel again.

"Hello, dad!" Good Lord! His hand felt almost . . . frail . . . in the soft leather glove! All the turbulence of the times and of his own soul came between the kiss he gave his mother, the affectionate, teasing, "Hi, adolescent!" to Pat. For Bernie he reserved the special greeting they always shared, knowing that he would soon no merit her embrace.

"Break it up, you two," his father chuckled, and Ralph was grateful both for the interruption and for the renewed heartiness in the familiar voice. He could not refuse giving one of his bags to the outstretched hand. "It's got books in it, dad . . . take it easy." He regretted the warning but there was no way in which he could modify the insinuation. This slip only added impact to the blow he received as they turned a snowy corner in a laughing group. Confronting them on the side of the depot was a giant poster calling for enlistments. The sharp smell of train smoke stung his eyes. Surely they must see it in his face . . . he was not going to enlist! But there was only a momentary silence in the light conversation, and then the talk surged up around him again, obviously in a vain effort to forget the implication of the words.

"Ralph, don't be so serious! We have a skating party planned for tomorrow night, and a carol sing for Christmas Eve." He couldn't dampen her animation. . . .

"That's swell, Bernie. I'll have

to get my skates sharpened, though."

"Well, son, good to have you home," his father said. "Pretty rough grind this last quarter? I remember my own junior year."

"Yes, dad, darn stiff. Even in modern languages!" They had never quite condoned his preparation for a career in the diplomatic service.

"We're having goose for Christmas dinner, Ralph. Bob got one up near the border."

In former years, he would have been ravenous at the suggestion. "And I'm going to be a cheerleader!" Pat said, excitedly, as they got into the car. Everyone was talking furiously about unimportant things, avoiding cumbustible topics with sharpened dexterity. The soft obscurity of Bernie's hair brushed his cheek, as they slid a little on the glassy street, and he said quickly, in place of the many things he would like to have said, "There's not this much snow at school." He realized that they were stopping in front of her home.

"You'd better get a good night's sleep to last you the rest of the week," she was saying. He hoped that she was really attributing his reticence to fatigue.

"I will . . . until noon tomorrow!" he said, for the benefit of his family, as he got out to escort her to the door. "Good night." The bitter cold of the night was an excellent excuse not to linger.

When they had come into the warmth and light of their own house, his mother remarked, "You look terribly haggard. Why don't you just have something to eat and go to bed right away?"

"I think maybe I will. Don't make any special fuss for me, though."

He walked into the living room. Pat had got a phone call the minute they entered the house, and her shrill enthusiasm intruded into the quiet. "You haven't had any moving orgies lately, I see," he called to his mother, noticing that the furniture was in the same arrangement he remembered from October.

"No, I don't like to ask your father to help me; he is always so tired. Besides, there is more room for the tree this way."

He wished she would lower her voice, even if dad was in the basement looking at the furnace. Pat whirled into the room, and over to the radio. "Jerry just called up and said they're broadcasting a transcription of our concert." Ralph watched the animated, high school pertness of his sister, and wished that he had sometime brought home a friend for a date with her. She would have been thrilled to go out with a "college man." Dave would never have appealed to her, though, with his quiet, unassuming manner, and grave respect for anything of the feminine gender. And now there would be lots of servicemen, stationed at the Fort. . . . Loud, discordant music careened into the room, simultaneous with his father's entrance.

"Pat, for heaven's sake, turn that down!"

"I'm sorry, dad. Oh . . . I suppose you want the news?"

"Not necessarily. Ralph and I can talk."

"Well, darn, there's too much static anyway. Here you are." With a self-sacrificing air, she walked out to the kitchen.

Mr. Lindsey looked at his son, the expression of amusement so pleasantly radiated by his features that Ralph felt another pang,

imagining it soon replaced by scorn and hurt. "Thanks!" his father called and sat forward tensely to hear the news. Ralph sat down rigidly in the hard uncomfortable chair which guests invariably chose. He suffered acutely through the suave urgency of the announcer's voice as it clipped off devastating syllables.

"The Japanese attack . . . home-front mobilization . . . blackouts . . . draft numbers . . ." There was slight possibility of evading the issue now. He could bring up the subject casually . . . the weather forecast was almost over . . .

"Come and get it, Ralph!" He looked at his father's face, drained of enery, and his resolve broke. Tomorrow. . . .

"All right, mom." He hoped he could no some justice to the food, sick as he was, after the sensation of being poised on the verge of unburdenment, and stopped short. His loneliness came back to him again as he sat down at the table set with only one place, surrounded by all the small special things he liked, thinking how loneliness would have to become an accepted part of his life.

"You'd better plan your party for some time in the next two weeks, Pat," his mother said, putting dishes back in the refrigerator with an annoying, cold clink of glass against glass. She was inferring, "So many of the boys will be going soon." She looked out to where she could see her husband going slowly up the front stairs. "I was just wondering, though, if we can choose a night when your father has to be away. The racket always disturbs him so, even if he won't admit it." Her eyes met her son's. "Pat Sansfield is home." Her voice was high in the quick change of subject. "You two ought to get together befor . . ." She turned on the faucet an the gushing water covered th words she did not want to say. H finished eating as quickly as h could. "I'll wash the dishes mom."

"Oh, just let them stand over night." All these little hints abou his father's tiredness, which h could see well enough for himself . . . were they trying to tell him something beyond that? He did not protest, feeling that he would drop the entire pile if he could not put them down quickly. The living room was empty.

"Has dad turned in already? He didn't say anything . . ."

"I imagine he's reading in bed . . . he does it often lately." They were both startled by the deep voice coming over the banister.

"Evelyn Lindsey! You make me sound like a decrepit plutocrat."

"Marshall, you know I did no such thing! You know what your favorite occupation is as well as I do!"

Ralph met his father half-way on the stairs. "Well, I'm going to be the plutocrat tonight, dad." This was no time to be overdemonstrative. "Good night." The instant of his saying the same two words to Bernie came back full force. If she could only understand, it would not be so horrible when his parents, especially dad denounced him as a coward and traitor to his family and country. Bed did not bring the welcome relief he wished. The very comfort of the mattress reminded him of the hard one at school . . . school reminded him of Dave . . . and Dave reminded him of the future. There would be no soft mattress there. The iron-frost chime of the courthouse clock struck incessant-

y, with long intervals of frightened wondering. . . .

"Ralph, it's ten o'clock!" He opened his eyes to daylight, and groaned.

"I'll be down in a minute."

Who had called him, mom or Pat? Funny how their voices sounded so much alike at times. He lay looking at his rifle, slung across the wall over his desk. The last time he had used it, dad and he had been hunting pheasants together. They would ask him how he could reconcile *that* killing. Helpless birds . . . yet shrinking from exterminating human beings who had taken the offensive? And there was really little plausible answer to give them. He got up, unrested.

"Where is everyone?" he asked, when he came downstairs to find his mother alone.

"Your father is at work and Pat has a music lesson."

"Oh, I guess it is kind of late."

"Bernie called you, but I wanted to let you sleep longer. She said that they're having a big sale day at the agency, and she won't even have the lunch hour free today."

He had to appear disappointed, not show that the delay was welcome. "Too bad. Well, I'll see her at the party tonight, anyway."

"Bernice is a lovely girl." It was the millionth time his mother had made the statement, and now it only served to make him more aware of what he was losing. He nodded as always, trying to ignore the morning paper with its deep black headlines. Dad always left it scattered around the kitchen in the morning.

As if a thought wave had passed between them, his mother said suddenly, "You know, your father did a funny thing the other day . . . just shows his sentimentality. Do you remember that old sled you used to play with on the refinery hill? Well, there are some new people down the street with some children. I noticed the little boy sliding on the walk the other day with a tray. I felt sorry for him and decided to have your sled fixed and give it to him. But when I mentioned it to your father, do you think he'd let me do it? He wouldn't give any definite reason . . . he just kept saying, 'No, it's Ralph's.' " There was a puzzled expression on Mrs. Lindsey's face. "Of course, I finally gave up. He can be so stubborn!"

Ralph choked on a piece of toast and went over to the sink hastily for a glass of water. There was nothing he could say.

The day moved slowly. He unpacked, went through the ordeal of lunch, to which his father came home, white from the cold, Pat red and violent about a pacifist sign she had seen in a creamery window. He almost told them then, but the telephone rang and there was a long discussion between his mother and a friend about Red Cross work.

As he piled on layers of sweaters that evening, he knew that he would find no release in the outdoor exercise. Being with the crowd would only accentuate his sensation of being an outcast; the talk would shift to the subject of the war unavoidably.

"Why don't you come too, dad?" he asked. "You could really show us something about figure skating." Again he knew he had said the wrong thing. He stopped himself from adding, "There'll be a fire."

"No thanks, son. This is a good night for me to get some business letters written. Your mother and

I are becoming more fond of this fireplace every year."

He made his escape, saying something indistinguishable, glad that Pat had already gone on with Jerry. The night was not really cold, just invigorating, and he walked hurriedly, pushing the pressing thoughts out of his mind as much as he could. Then he was on the doorstep of Bernie's house, looking at the brilliant Christmas tree through the open Venetian blinds, making his eyes focus correctly upon the blur of tinsel and lights. Mrs. Fredricks answered the door, cordial and stately as always.

"Good evening, Ralph." He doubted if anything, aside from his forthcoming announcement, could perturb the woman. "Bernice will be ready in just a minute," she said, drawing him into the room which smelled of pine fragrance, a little hypnotic, after the pure outdoor air. He was saved from making polite conversation by the almost immediate appearance of Bernie, who was wearing a red coat he particularly liked. It was so natural to say, "Hi, redbird."

"Have a good time," her mother said, repeating the words he had heard in his own home a short time before.

"Thanks, we will." At least she hadn't asked him anything about his father's health.

"We're off!" Bernie smiled at him, and he seized her hand.

"Yes, to a wonderful evening." That was a lie, for his part, anyway. "I hope you aren't tired, after all your work today."

"No, not at all. But I'm afraid you still look a little worn. . . ." She was looking at him critically under a street light.

"I feel fine; the bed was just too comfortable last night is all."

"Not too many are coming to night . . . mostly the high schoo crowd, and the ones we know bes . . . Pete Sloan, Caroll Henderson . . . We've even got hot cider fo you!"

"Swell! It's a perfect nigh . . . " He had said that before "No wind, all the stars out. I ca hear them already . . . is tha music, too?"

"Yes. I don't know how h manages it, but Jimmy Van Dors can play the harmonica while h skates! No . . . seriously, they have a portable phonograph. We'l be able to waltz."

Ahead of them, the street sloped down to end in a path leading toward the river. Caught up by the laughter rising toward them Ralph broke into a run, and they raced recklessly. He achieved and sustained a mood of hilarity, as he laced Bernie's shoes, greeted friends laughingly, approved the depth and smoothness of the ice and then skated daringly in the patterns they had worked on, winter after winter. But the careless gaiety was brief. He tried to keep Bernice from seeing his increasing anxiety, but she knew him too well. At last they withdrew from the group, and glided silently around the bend, where the ice was not so smooth, but where they were alone.

"What is it, Ralph?" She stopped circling abruptly, and faced him, commandingly.

"You know there *is* something!"

"Of course. You've been acting strange ever since you got back."

"I hope you'll remember this night," he said. The words sounded foolish, and he wished he had found something else to say.

"What do you mean?" She

was standing calm and vivid against the dull silver ice.

"I mean that you must be told this sooner or later, but I can't expect you to understand. I purposely didn't write anything . . ."

"Ralph, if I can't understand you, no one can, not even your parents. You know that."

"You won't want to touch me after this. I'm registering as a . . . conscientious objector."

Her expression didn't change. "Your roommate—Dave?"

"Yes. I've told you enough about him so that perhaps you can see . . . it took a long time for me to be convinced, but . . . Oh, Bernie! It's telling you . . . telling my father. . . ."

"You haven't told your mother and dad then?"

"Not yet. I can't bring myself to do it. It's dad I care most about."

"Then let's go and tell them together." She grasped his hand warmly.

Ralph was incredulous. She was not condemning him. He looked at her in disbelief. In a hard voice, concealing his emotion, he said, "If it is just because you . . . love me, and not because you respect my convictions . . ."

"It's both," she said. "It's both."

He stood a moment longer, but her eyes didn't waver. Then he pressed her hand, and they started for the river bank together.

The Locked Door

By BARBARA DOCKERY

Oh tell me what's behind that old locked door—
What treasure could be hidden there inside?
Maybe the key is lost and gone, the key
That would reveal what someone wants to hide.

Oh tell me what's behind your young locked heart.
What gem is there that no one knows about?
I wish that you would give to me the key
That let's me in or maybe let's you out!